Mistress Madcap Surrenders

EDITH BISHOP SHERMAN

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MISTRESS MADCAP SURRENDERS

BOOKS BY

EDITH BISHOP SHERMAN

MISTRESS MADCAP

MISTRESS MADCAP SURRENDERS

YOUNG MODERNS BOOKS

MISTRESS MADCAP SURRENDERS

A Rebel Heroine in the Revolution

BY

EDITH BISHOP SHERMAN

Junior Books

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TO MY FIRST FRIEND
MY MOTHER

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Two Go Calling	1
II.	Mehitable Receives a Note	20
III.	Charity Relates a Fairy Tale	37
IV.	The Powder Mill	52
V.	In the Night	74
VI.	A Visit to Headquarters	86
VII.	The Rout at Arnold's Tavern	98
VIII.	The Spy	108
IX.	"Greater Love Hath No Man"	120
X.	The Fine Lady	138
XI.	At Mistress Hedden's	154
XII.	Fire	173
XIII.	Man Proposes	187
XIV.	Maid Disposes	203
XV.	An Unconscious Betrayal	215
XVI.	A Ride for Liberty	231
XVII.	The Wedding Guest	238

MISTRESS MADCAP
SURRENDERS

MISTRESS MADCAP SURRENDERS

CHAPTER I

TWO GO CALLING

'TIS monstrous fine," said Mehitable Condit, out of a long silence, "only—think you the left eye is not a trifle higher than the right?"

The little old man to whom she spoke leaned back upon his stool at this, the better to stare anxiously at a wooden sign propped upon a rush-bottomed chair facing him. Mehitable's younger sister, Charity, a slender, pretty girl standing behind him, gazed worriedly at the sign, too. A moment passed while critical inspection of the rather crude painting—that of a horse's head—held them motionless. They made a quaint group, for this was in the year of 1779, and brave was the little old man in blue velvet breeches, wine-colored vest, lace ruffles to his shirt sleeves and with a comical pigtail so tightly braided it stood straight out from the back of his head. The two girls were more soberly clad in plain, homespun gowns and long, heavy capes, back-flung over their shoulders,

while an old lady, cozily ensconced in an arm chair near-by, benignly watching the artist over a pair of gray socks she was knitting, was also garbed in homespun. It was a comfortable scene. Only the fire in the great fireplace seemed to roar defiance to the snow-threatening sky outside the window.

Finally, the old man, sighing, took up his paint brush once more and applied it gingerly to the painting. Then, leaning back, he squinted professionally through his half-closed fist. Soberly, the two sisters imitated him, though they could not see that it helped in the least. One eye of the horse most assuredly was out of place—no amount of squinting could alter that!

At last, Dame Wright startled everyone. At her merry laugh, the three hands dropped and three sheepish faces turned to meet her quizzical glance.

"Ma faith—an yo' knew hoo queerlike yo' all looked!" she chuckled. "A body wad think yo' were a' at sea, makin' spyglasses oot o' yer hands sae!"

Her husband looked over at her reproachfully. "Noo, Mither," he answered in an injured tone, "'tis thus the real artists always do! Dinna yo' ken we were doin' nobbut lookin' at yon sign sic Hitty, here, said ain eye o' the horse were higher than t'other!" Leaning forward, he dabbed hastily for a moment, then he glanced triumphantly at Mehitable. "Noo, Hitty—hoo be it?"

By some happy chance, he had gotten the misfit eye to respond to his coaxing brush. Mehitable clapped her hands.

"Well done, Master Wright!" she cried cordially. "Indeed," she hurried on, while Charity smilingly added her little chirp of praise, "I know not how ye thought o' such a clever sign for the Horse's Neck Tavern!"

A flush of pride suffused the old man's face; but he shook his head. "It be nowt!" he answered, with false modesty. "Gin yo' do a thing lang enough, lassie, yo' canna help doin' it weel! Like Mither tendin' her geese," he added slyly. "A bonnier flock nor a more expert goose girl yo' will search far to find. And why? Experience, Hitty, time and patience—I ha' been a-paintin' signs and Mither ha' been tendin' her geese for many, many years! Time and patience can do all things, they say. Aiblins they be richt!"

Master Wright turned and looked away, as though he could see, through the walls of his kitchen, that little village in old Scotland where his apprenticeship had been served under a hard taskmaster whose "weel done" he had never heard because, with youthful impatience, he had run away.

"Time and patience!" he repeated, sighing. "I might hae been a court painter, who knows, 'stead o' a struggling farmer and occasional sign painter

an I had had a smattering o' either, wi' a little sense, besides!"

But Mehitable moved impatiently. "Aye, mayhap," she shrugged, sensing a reproof beneath his words, for she well knew her impetuous ways were criticized by the old Scotch couple. "Mayhap—yet patience was ne'er a favorite o' mine, so I fear me I shall excel in nothing—not even geese-tending!"

As usual, gentle Charity hastened to smooth over her sister's words. "Is't true, sir," she interposed in her quiet little voice, "that the Horse's Neck Tavern between Newark and Paulus Hook was quite destroyed by the British?"

"Aye." Master Wright, who had been staring not overly pleased at Mehitable, turned with a brightening face to Charity. "It be true." He fell busily to work again. "It all happened from a silly brawl—the Hessians, as is their custom each time at bread-baking time, brought some o' their camp women to coax, or coerce, the Jersey wives to bestow half o' their bakin' upon them. But mine host had grown tired o' the custom and refused—foolishly, yo' ken. So they burned his tavern to the ground. Noo this sign be for his new home, though the gude mon, e'en wi' his neighbors' help, hae scarcely finished it. Yet I shall be busy wi' my spring plantin' aiblins when he wants

it, sae I be doin' it noo. And hoo does yer faythe get on wi' his work?"

"Oh, he be ever busy, an not outside, then inside!" It was Mehitable who answered her host's question; but her tone was absent. She was staring out of the window at the snowflakes which were beginning to drift down from the leaden sky. "Cherry, what say ye! Had we not better start? I fear me there be a bad storm brewing!"

"Aye, 'tis true!" Charity, too, gave an anxious glance out at the snowflakes as she pulled her heavy cape up over her shoulders and followed her sister to Dame Wright's chair to make her manners before departure.

"Not goin' to bide a wee wi' us!" exclaimed the old lady, laying down her knitting. "Think yo' better not bide till the storm be over?" she queried hospitably.

"Nay!" laughed Mehitable. "The storm might last for a day or so, good Mistress Wright. And our mother would be worried, forsooth!"

"Weel, then,"—Dame Wright leaned forward in her chair and reached for a little rush-woven basket which stood upon an adjacent table—"weel, then, gie this to your mother, my dear. It be nobbut a wee bit o' Scotch cake, for which she asked the receipt. See—I ha' written it and placed it upon the bottom o' the basket." She lifted the napkin

and showed the girls the recipe. "Nay," she smilingly waved away their thanks, "it be nowt."

"But, truly, it be nice!" insisted Mehitable, curtseying as she took the basket. "It has been so long since Mother used the bake oven—it needs mending, and we have had naught but hoecakes baked in the ashes for ever so long. Not," she added to herself, "that we would get *cake* an it were mended!"

As though she had read her young guest's thought, Mistress Wright blushed a little. "I feel guilty every time I mak' ma cake," she said in her soft old voice. "But Feyther must hae his bit o' sweetie, and sae I knit, knit, knit socks for oor poor men at Morris Town to mak' up for it."

Impulsively, Mehitable bent her dark head to kiss the ancient cheeks, which were yet as smooth and pink and white as a baby's. "Nay," she cried, feeling ashamed of the criticism she had allowed to creep into her gaze, "let the young people be the ones to sacrifice!"

Mistress Wright followed them to the door and watched them rather anxiously as Mehitable boosted Charity into the pillion on old Dulcie and, lightly as a boy, leaped into the saddle in front.

"Think yo' they will get hame before the storm?" she asked her husband over her shoulder, replying to Mehitable's wave as horse and girls disappeared around a bend in the lane.

"I hae ma doots," answered John Wright. He reached over and jerked his buckskin coat from the chair back. "Do 'ee close the door, Mither," he mumbled, struggling into it. "Lettin' out ma' gude heat, thus!"

But Dame Wright paused in the open doorway to watch her geese waddling home before the storm. "Yo' canna deny they be a bonnie sicht, Feyther!" she observed proudly.

"Aye—though the older ain do be growin' rather pert, I'm thinkin'!" replied old John's voice behind her.

Dame Wright turned around and stared at him. "Wha!" she exclaimed. "Wha, Feyther?"

"Why, 'tis Hitty I speak of," said Master Wright, in equal surprise, appearing at her side. "Were yo' not sayin' summat aboot Samuel Condit's lassies?"

Dame Wright burst into laughter. "Nay!" she gasped, when she could speak. "'Twas the geese, John!"

"A' the same," grinned John Wright, "geese and lassies—a' the same!"

"Now, Feyther!" protested his wife, chuckling, however. "Dinna be sae mean."

And the heavy door closed upon the two merry old faces.

Mehitable and Charity, meanwhile, trotted on through a storm which was fast increasing in vio-

lence; but so absorbed were they in that vast subject which concerned everyone—the war—for this was the exciting, perilous time of the American Revolution—that they did not notice the bitter wind or the sting of the sleety snow. The Revolution had dragged on for four long years. Long since had the Minute Men repelled the British at Lexington and Concord, long since had Washington crossed the Delaware at Trenton. The American army had passed the first winter at Morris Town and that dreary winter at Valley Forge. Soldiers and civilians alike were beginning the terrific winter of 1779–80 with grim dread and grimmer fortitude, lonely hearths with gaps in the family circles once occupied by fathers and sons were becoming more common, now, and the two girls were speaking mournfully of their brother, John Condit, who was a surgeon under Washington, and whom they had not seen for months, when all at once Mehitable exclaimed in a startled tone. They had descended abruptly from the lane into a meadow already white with snow!

"Why, Cherry, I vow 'tis a blizzard which hath swept o'er the Orange Mountain upon us!" She tried to peer through the baffling curtain of snowflakes. "We be off the lane and in someone's field, but whose, I know not! And which way lies the lane, I know not, either!"

"Oh, Hitty!" Charity, frail and timid, tried to

repress the fright she felt. "Are ye not feared?" She shuddered. "Oh, I wish we were home."

"Nay, Cherry," Mehitable spoke chidingly, "do ye not remember what our father and John have often told us about being lost in a storm?"

"Aye." Charity's face brightened. "Give the steed his head in case o'——"

"Exactly!" said Mehitable triumphantly, throwing the reins down upon Dulcie's neck. "Let the steed guide us, in case we know not which way lies home. I have, mayhap, been guiding her entirely in the wrong direction. See," she added with a laugh, as the old horse turned completely around and started off briskly in the opposite direction, "it was so!"

A few minutes more found them back upon the road. But an hour or so later, Mehitable was not laughing. Instead, she was very, very sober, for night, settling down drearily upon them, found them still struggling on through the snow. It was slow going, indeed, for poor Dulcie, with her double burden! At last, feeling her sister shivering behind her, Mehitable turned in her saddle.

"Art so cold, Cherry?" she asked pityingly.

"No," answered Charity bravely. Then, an instant later, she burst into tears. "Ah, yes, Hitty, I am co-old! Oh, it be so dark and co-old!"

Mehitable longed to tear aside that harassing, blinding curtain of snow. If only she could see a

shelter, any sort of a shelter, she thought wistfully, as she heard Charity's teeth chattering together and felt her slight body shivering against her own stout one. But it was another hour before she cried out.

"Cherry, I think—nay, I be sure we are nearing a building at last! There, to our right!" Mehitable gestured excitedly, then picking up the reins, she guided Dulcie in that direction, and soon they were halting before a plain stone structure beside the road. "Why, it be the Ranfield Tavern!" she announced.

A figure, shapeless from many bundlings and wrappings, approaching them from the lee of the building, Mehitable made out the tavern host, himself.

"Ho, Master Ranfield!" she called.

"Good even to ye, mistress," answered Master Ranfield uncertainly, then, as he came nearer, his tone changed. "'Tis little Mistress Condit! Why, what be ye doing out in such weather as this? Here, let me help ye down!"

"Nay, I can assist myself!" laughed Mehitable, declining his proffered hand and leaping lightly to the snow-covered ground. She pointed to the drooping figure upon the pillion seat. "I fear it be Cherry who needs your help!" she continued, a note of anxiety in her cheerful young voice.

Charity, however, straightened her weary back

as Master Ranfield, with an exclamation of concern, turned toward her. "Nay, I need no help, either!" she said. "I was—was but waiting for ye to get down, Hitty—that be why I did not move and—and—I had my head bent because the snow kept getting into my mouth!"

In spite of her brave words, though, it was a stiffened, staggering little maid whom the tavern host lifted to the ground the next instant. "There," he bade kindly, "run into the house wi' ye! I will care for the nag!"

Protecting, as best they could, their faces from the icy wind and the sleety particles of snow, which hurt, the two girls made for the door and entered the taproom. But there they paused uncomfortably. Mistress Ranfield, they had just remembered, was reputed to be a Tory!

"Nay," whispered Charity, "let us not enter, Hitty!"

"We must!" returned Mehitable desperately. "Hush—there she is!"

A sallow-faced woman, standing idly before the fire, looked up peevishly as the door swung shut behind the girls. But she came forward civilly enough to help them remove their wet capes and to fetch the bootjack for the high boots which their mother sensibly made them wear in winter. It was only when Mehitable, stamping her aching feet, knelt to help Charity with her clinging boots

that, glancing up shyly, she caught a malevolent expression in Mistress Ranfield's eyes. Flushed and uncomfortable, Mehitable kept on with her task. At last the inn mistress spoke acidly.

"I wonder your mother allowed ye to be out in such weather as this!"

"We were upon an errand to Dame Wright's—we do love to call upon the dear old people!—and our mother gave us permission to do so this day!" explained Charity eagerly. "And—and the storm was upon us before we knew it!"

"Before ye knew it! H'm! Yet it hath been threatening for hours!" sniffed Mistress Ranfield disdainfully. "The Whigs talk o' saving and conserving! Yet do they risk their children's lives thus rashly, taking then the care and time o' a doctor who might be serving i' their wonderful army! All talk, say I—Whigs and talk which means nothing! 'Tis actions which speak! What good does it to gi' sons to fight an they take up the time o' someone else who might he helping their fine cause!"

Both girls turned scarlet, for they felt the enmity toward their mother—a brave and patriotic woman—which surrounded the tavern mistress's words, and Mehitable, especially, had hard work to control her unruly tongue. But she conquered the impulse to give utterance to the bitter words which might have caused trouble—perhaps a glance to-

ward the snow-dimmed window helped her to do so—and after a little, Mistress Ranfield, her face dark and sullen, caught up the wet capes and boots and stalked from the room.

"Oh, Hitty," whispered Charity, creeping closer to her, "I do wish we had not stopped here! That woman be in favor wi' the British—her inn hath never been touched! And, indeed, Mistress Katurah Harrison did tell our mother that, for a certainty almost, 'tis known she accepts recompense from the enemy for information she gets by prying and spying. Why, she be naught but a British spy—and the worst kind, for she takes money for her loyalty. She be as bad as the Hessians. who fight for hire!"

"This be a public tavern, licensed as such, and here I intend to remain, welcome or not, until the storm permits our going on!" answered Mehitable loudly.

The door into the kitchen, at that, was pulled shut with a slam, and Mehitable chuckled rather naughtily to herself. But both girls turned with relief when their host, shaking himself at the entrance, came into the taproom from the inn yard and, closing the heavy door, approached the fire with smiling mien. He was a kindly mannered, good-natured man, neither Whig nor Tory, who was far more popular in the neighborhood than his shrill-voiced helpmate.

"Forsooth, ye came at just the right time—supper-time!" he told his young guests jokingly, holding out his great red hands to the heat. "Crimini, it be cold! Think, 'tis not yet the holidays! All signs point to a hard winter, and certes, this be a fine beginning!"

A knock interrupted him, then, as stamping feet proclaimed the arrival of more guests, and Master Ranfield started away from the fireplace to answer the loud summons of a second thundering upon the door, the sisters had just barely time to retreat to a corner nook when the door was flung open and three men entered the public room. Replying briefly to thieir host's pleased greeting—for he had anticipated a loss of business from the storm—the newcomers made directly for the warmth of the fireplace. Much bustling ensued, then—there was unwrapping of capes and great coats, of woolen mufflers and shawls, during which both host and hostess, with a grinning black or two, were kept busy carrying away the wet clothing and bringing back mugs of warm ale, ordered at once, from the kitchen fire. Mistress Ranfield's face was all smiles, now, and there was no lack of cordiality in her manner of helping one of the new guests, at least—a handsome, strapping youth in the silks and laces of a dandy. The other guests were older men, dressed richly but more soberly.

Mehitable and Charity watched the scene si-

lently from their corner. At last, the eyes of the two girls met suddenly, significantly.

"Is that not Hawtree?" whispered Charity noiselessly, her gaze full of horror, for the man, Hawtree, was a notorious Tory whom they had reason both to fear and to dislike.

At that instant, as though he felt their eyes upon him, Hawtree whirled around, and his cold, level glance rested upon them. There was no sign of recognition in it, however, and a second later he turned away with apparent indifference.

Charity's face was white, and she clutched at Mehitable spasmodically. "The other," she whispered, pointing wildly, "the other be Jaffray! Is it so?"

Mehitable stared, then her cheeks, too, paled. But she lifted her chin. "It be so, Cherry," she whispered steadily, "yet I defy them both!"

Charity, however, as she gazed at a villain into whose power the fortune of war had once thrown her, wrung her hands. "Three years, and here they return!" she panted. "Heaven forgi' me—I—had hoped they were both dead!"

Fortunately, amid the preparations for supper, her panic was unnoticed. The long table in the center of the room was covered by a snowy linen cloth—Mistress Ranfield, Tory or no Tory, was a notable housewife and cook—and spread with pewter dishes and flagons of ale and cider. A

platter of chicken pie graced the center of the board, and when that had been brought in, steaming, host and guests drew up their chairs hungrily. Only Mehitable and Charity, like shy country mice, remained in the background. Mistress Ranfield, at one end of the table, paid them not the slightest attention; but finally her husband, glancing up from his plate, spoke in surprise.

"How now?" he ejaculated. "Like ye not the food or the company, young mistresses? Which be it?"

"Neither, sir," answered Mehitable politely. She hesitated. "'Tis just that we feel our mother would—would not like us to eat wi' strangers in a public room," she tried to explain.

There was a sniff from Mistress Ranfield's end of the table, a mutter of "Fiddlesticks!" and Charity looked as though she were about to weep from embarrassment. Fortunately, however, the other guests were much too engrossed in the platter of chicken, which had begun to circulate about the board, to notice the little scene, and Master Ranfield, with true kindliness and a reproachful glance at his wife, soon had the two girls supplied with a little table of their own, with an ample and goodly supply of food to grace it which, despite Mistress Ranfield's scowl, the sisters proceeded to enjoy.

After supper, the three masculine guests, the

younger one of whom was now casting eyes in the girls' direction, drew up their chairs before the fireplace. In doing so, they showed not the least bit of consideration for Mehitable and Charity, completely cutting off the heat from their corner. Moreover, as time passed and more ale was consumed, they waxed quarrelsome, a phase which Master Ranfield and his wife were discreet enough not to notice.

Mehitable, perceiving the young dandy's black-eyed gaze upon her whenever she lifted her own eyes, at last grew uneasy. Master Ranfield, she felt sure, though affable and good-natured, was not one to interfere in case of unpleasantness, while his wife, the girl noticed indignantly, far from helping the disagreeable situation, was egging on the foolish youth with knowing smiles and glances.

Finally, discovering Charity nodding in her chair and feeling as though her last defence had crumpled, Mehitable stumbled to her feet and moved to a window near the door, both to escape the obnoxious stares with which the young dandy was favoring her and to discover whether the snow had stopped falling. To her joy and relief, upon clearing a portion of a pane of glass by rubbing the steam from it, she perceived that the weather was clearing, and she was about to turn away to tell Charity so when she felt, rather than saw, someone

stop beside her. The next instant, before she could speak, she was drawn roughly into an embrace and pressed smotheringly against a broad chest.

"Let me go, sir!" With blazing eyes, Mehitable spoke as soon as she was partially released. But the dandy, who had sneaked after her to the window and who had snatched her into his arms half in fun, merely simpered down into her face.

"What'll ye gi' me an I do?" he asked, after awhile, keeping his arm around her waist.

"Naught!" returned Mehitable shortly. "Release me, sir, I prithee!"

"'Tis not thus we play at forfeits!" The young man's tone was gravely injured and complaining. "Pay me a forfeit and I will let ye go, pretty spitfire!"

"Never!" Mehitable straightened her slender figure defiantly, which only made the other laugh.

"Alas!" he said lazily, with a prodigious sigh of mock patience. "Then must we stand here all night!"

Mehitable twisted herself in his grasp to glance despairingly around the room. Strangely enough, neither tavern host nor hostess were to be seen—poor Mehitable had not noticed Mistress Ranfield motioning her puzzled husband into the kitchen a few moments before, Charity was fast asleep in her chair, worn out by her hard afternoon, and the

two men who had accompanied Mehitable's annoyer were engaged in a noisy game of cards by the fire. The youth's gaze following hers, he burst into teasing laughter.

"No help anywhere, ye see, mistress!" he taunted. And indeed, he and the girl might have been ghosts and not visible to mortal eye for all the attention paid them by the gamesters.

CHAPTER II

MEHITABLE RECEIVES A NOTE

"COME, come!" went on the young man lightly. "Pay the forfeit! My arm be tired o' encircling your waist!"

"Then," said a new voice grimly, as the door beside them opened and closed so swiftly that only the faintest draught of air swept past, "then I advise ye to keep your arm where it belongs!" And the dandy was forthwith torn from his nonchalant position beside Mehitable and sent spinning across the room.

"Now," continued the newcomer, when the reeling youth had brought up against the card table and the players had started to their feet, "an I mistake not, there be a lesson in politeness to be taught here! I saw you, sir, through the window as I approached the door! You were annoying this maid, and your manners"—his tone grew icy—"your manners, I repeat, sir, need to be *whipped* into shape!"

But here the newcomer was interrupted by a wild cry of "John!" and the next instant Mehita-

ble's head was buried against the buff and blue chest of her big brother. Dr. John Condit looked down at her dark curls in almost comical amazement; but when he lifted his own head, his face had darkened so ominously that the three men who watched him across the taproom, despite their combined numbers, felt odd little chills run up and down their spines.

"I did not know it was my *sister* whom I arrived in time to rescue from a bully and a coward!" said Doctor Condit, and there was that in his voice which made the others glance uneasily at one another. "It gives the matter a more serious aspect!"

In the instant of taut silence which followed, the hands of Jaffray and the youth sought their sword hilts. A quick glance from the third man, Hawtree, however, caused their hands to drop, although the young dandy folded his arms belligerently even as his companion spoke a suave apology.

"Ye must pardon a foolish lad, sir!" said Hawtree. "The ale, forsooth, must have gone to his head. He but jested wi' the young lady, I vow!"

"Did it go to your head, too, sir, and to the head of the other—*gentleman?*" asked John pointedly, placing insolent accent upon the last word and looking at them with steely eyes. "I noticed no attempt upon your part to release my sister from an embarrassing position and to administer de-

served reproof to a coward who would take advantage of a maid's helplessness!"

"Nay, sir," protested the other, "we were busy wi' the cards and noticed naught! We are more than willing to offer apology to your sister!" Then as Jaffray and the youth remained silent, Hawtree glanced at them with such furious threat that, very reluctantly, they imitated his bow.

John Condit hesitated, until Mehitable nudged him. "I accept the apology," she said impatiently, not glancing toward the fireplace, but speaking with her eyes anxiously upon her brother's frowning countenance. "Come, let us not waste more time here! Let us away!" she urged. "It clears, so I will waken Cherry!" And she sprang toward her sister's chair.

John Condit, at that, was forced to bestow a stiff half bow upon the three men, who then stood watching, from beneath crafty, lowered lids, his and his sisters' departure.

Mistress Ranfield, when summoned by Doctor Condit, was again all smiles and curtseys at his unexpected appearance, though she pretended hurt at his curt refusal of supper. Her hand, however, closed eagerly around the coins he dropped into her palm in payment of his sisters' refreshment, for coins were rare and much in preference to the paper money which had been issued by Congress.

"She did not deserve to be paid in coins," ob-

served Mehitable when, once more mounted, they were trotting off through the snow toward home. "I am sorry ye gave them her, John, for she not only said slighting things which showed her ill-will toward our mother and all the patriotic women o' Orange Valley; but she was partly to blame for this night's unpleasantness, urging the silly varlet on as she did!"

"Indeed, had I known that," said John Condit, "I would ha' given her naught, not e'en paper money, for she deserved to lose the price o' your suppers!"

Charity, who had wakened from her dreams to find herself being carried out to her pillion seat upon Dulcie by her big brother, patted his arm appealingly, for he had placed Mehitable upon his horse and had mounted himself upon Dulcie to lend support to the frail little sister.

"Nay—let us forget the unpleasantness!" she pleaded, snuggling sleepily against him. "Tell us, rather, what fortunate errand brings ye home again to us after so many months, John!"

The young army surgeon's weatherbeaten face softened as he reached behind him to pat the little, mittened hand that Charity placed confidingly in his strong grasp. "Cherry be always right, Hitty!" he suggested. "Why spoil this happy reunion? Why talk o' aught but pleasant subjects —such as my return?" he added drolly.

They all laughed and Mehitable, humming, fell to studying the star-specked dome above her, for the snow had washed the air, and the heavens seemed very close to earth.

"Besides," continued John mysteriously, after a pause, "I do, indeed, ha' something pleasant to discuss!"

He chuckled as he noticed the instant attention he received. Charity leaned forward eagerly, and Mehitable rode her horse close enough to him to stare into his face.

"Why, what——" she began. She started as she felt something slipped into her hand when it brushed against his above Dulcie's fat side. Her tone changed. "A note!" she cried in rapturous amazement. "A really-truly note—for me! With —with—sealing wax and *every*thing!"

"A note, Hitty!" Charity leaned sideways upon her pillion. "Let me feel the seal!" Then, as her sister obligingly obeyed her request, she gave an excited bounce. "It feels like the one ye got from Cousin Eliza that time from Trenton!"

Mehitable sighed gustily. "Must I wait until I get home to read it! Oh, an there were only lights along this dark lane instead o' just the stars!"

"Instead o' *just* the stars!" echoed John laughingly. "Be thankful, mistress, it be not cloudy and dark as last night! I had a fearful time o't,

riding on dispatch business, for I lost the road more than once. As for lights along this lane, Hitty—mayhap a hundred years or more will find some, as the lamps are hung on every seventh house i' New York Town to light the streets there. Yet —that would mean houses built as closely together, side by side, row after row, ye mind, as New York hath, and 'twill be more than one hundred years before this Orange meadowland and swampland and the Mountain be populated as thickly as a' that. More like three hundred years. Therefore I fear, Hitty"—he peered at her gravely through the shadows while Charity's tinkling laugh rang out—"I greatly fear ye will not live to see lights along the First Road, here!"

Mehitable tossed her head. "I'll warrant ye there will be stranger sights around here than lights along this lane, John, before another century," she retorted. "Besides, I be old enough to wait until I get home to read the missive, I should hope!" A moment later, however, her tone changed to one of beseeching childishness. "Oh, John!" she cried inconsistently. "There be Samuel Munn's tavern, with a lanthorn swinging in front o' the door! Do let me stop beneath its light and read my note!"

"But ye said ye hoped ye were old enough to wait, Hitty!" teased her brother.

He might as well have spoken to the wind. Me-

hitable swerved her horse toward the tavern light and a moment later, seated in her saddle beneath its rays, she broke the note's seal with an eager thumb nail and spread it open upon her horse's neck. When she had painstakingly spelled out the fine, slanting handwriting which met her gaze, she glanced up excitedly.

"Listen, Cherry," she began, and stopped in vexed surprise. John and Charity had ridden on, and she was alone beneath the light. Because of the unbroken snow, though, the laughing pair had not gotten as far ahead of her as they had intended, and soon Mehitable's horse carried her abreast of them in the narrow road.

"'Twas a mean thing to do! A sorry jest, indeed!" she exclaimed wrathfully. But at John's grin her usual good-nature asserted itself, and she could not help grinning back at him. "Some folk ha' such childish notions o' fun!" she said, more mildly.

"And some people ha' such childish lack o' patience!" answered John promptly.

"'Tis true!" sighed Mehitable. "E'en as I was telling Master Wright this very afternoon. I suppose I might ha' waited until I reached home before reading my note! But, John," she hurried on, "know ye aught o' the contents?"

"Well," he smiled, "I knew the note was from

Cousin Eliza, for she gave it me to deliver to ye at my first opportunity."

"From Cousin Eliza!" interrupted Charity in surprise. "But she lives in Trenton and John comes from Morris Town! He but now told me so!"

"Cousin Eliza lives in Trenton, 'tis true," admitted Mehitable, before her brother could speak. "It seems, however—an ye give a chance, Cherry, I will explain!—it seems she hath been visiting her old friend, Mistress Lindsley, on the Whippanong Road out o' Morris Town, and while there—indeed, almost upon her arrival, she fell and broke her ankle. 'Tis a most painful and tedious injury, she says, and the ladies o' the household being very busy, she is left much o' the time alone, for her French maid, Félice, fell sick just before she started and so had to be left at home. Now, forsooth, she wants you and me, Cherry, to come and stay awhile, wi' Mistress Lindsley's permission, to act as her nurses and companions. She says John hath promised to implore our mother to allow us to go. She says also"—Mehitable looked obliquely at her brother and laughed—"that though the menfolk o' the Lindsley family be gone much o' the time, there is to be a gay winter in the village, from all reports, wi' the nice young officers quartered there, American and French! Indeed, she

hath heard already that Colonel Hamilton be planning some routs and assemblies. Would it not be wonderful!"

"Wonderful!" echoed Charity. "Oh, John, think ye Mother will let us go?"

"Why not?" asked John Condit kindly. "Besides helping poor Cousin Eliza, who hath always been good to us, I, myself, think it would be very nice to ha' my two little sisters comparatively near me for awhile."

"Then ye will help us to gain Mother's permission?" Mehitable looked at him eagerly.

"Aye," answered John laughingly, "if you think my word counts more than yours wi' our mother."

"It does!" answered Mehitable simply. "Mother thinks ye be almost perfect!"

"Nay," said John, laughing still more, "ye do not give our mother credit for good sense, Hitty, an ye say that!"

"'Tis true," returned Mehitable, "laugh as ye may, John. Mothers always like their sons better, I think," she added reflectively. "I shall, I know!"

"Hitty!" said Charity's shocked voice. Whereupon they all fell to laughing foolishly and happily.

The rest of the journey home beneath the bright stars, with the cold, crisp air reddening cheeks and —it must be admitted—noses as well, was made concocting all sorts of hilarious plans.

"It be so delightful living i' this year 1779!" exclaimed Mehitable blithely, following the others in through the Condit gate. "I would not live in any other time an I could! Think o' the past—a hundred years ago, wi' the people coming down to New Jersey in boats from Branford village in Connecticut—don't laugh, John, I ha' it all from Grannie Pierson, who hath heard her own mother tell about it. How desolate this mountain must have been then—no plantations here, no lanes, nothing but wilderness and forest and Indians! And think o' a hundred years hence, e'en wi' the lights in the lanes." She glanced saucily at her brother as she pulled up her horse and watched him dismount. "Mayhap they will not have war and any such exciting adventures as are apt to befall one now!"

"How do ye know!" jeered her brother, lifting Charity down from her pillion and approaching Mehitable's horse to lead him, with old Dulcie, to the barn. "Don't stand there shivering, Cherry—run right into the house!" he added over his shoulder. "And come, Hitty, jump down! All this beatitude," he chuckled, "because o' a most dreadful war! Fie, my foolish sister, think o' the ragged soldiers at Morris Town!"

"Oh, I do!" answered Mehitable reproachfully. "I knit ever so many socks for them, John—ye can't think! Besides," her bright face fell, "may-

hap Mother will not let us go to visit Cousin Eliza at Morris Town, after all!"

But Mistress Condit, when the girls had burst in upon her, both talking excitedly at once, seemed as pleased as her daughters upon reading the note, although she sighed and said:

"Poor Eliza—for all her wealth, she seems e'er to ha' bad luck! I mind that dreadful Christmas at Trenton when she had to have all those Hessians quartered in her fine house."

There was a moment's silence as she read on. Then she exclaimed in dismay:

"Routs and assemblies! But, my dear little maids, what o' clothes! Ye ha' both outgrown the party gowns Cousin Eliza did give to ye that same Christmas I wot of! And ye cannot attend balls in homespun!" She looked from one disappointed face to another. "Never mind," she went on kindly, "Mother will find a way, somehow! Ah, my son, 'tis good to see you again!"

She turned with brightening eyes to greet her boy, and Charity watched in sympathetic silence the long embrace which spoke so eloquently of the long, hard months of separation. Mehitable, as soon as she had heard her brother outside the door, and knowing then that the matter of a visit to Morris Town would be dismissed from her mother's mind in welcoming the young soldier, had hastily filled a brass warming pan with coals from the fire

and had departed to warm the beds. Charity, quietly hanging up on its wooden peg Mehitable's cape as well as her own, turned as her mother addressed her at last.

"My dear," questioned Mistress Condit, drawing her son over to a place beside her upon the fireside bench and pulling Charity down to her lap, "where were ye? Your father and I were indeed worried when supper-time came and went without any word from our little maids. We thought the storm might delay ye, but not as late as this."

"It was the snow, Mother," nodded Charity. "'Twas a bitter storm while it lasted. But, oh, such a tale as Hitty hath to tell ye—what happened as I slept i' my chair!"

Mistress Condit turned inquiringly to her son who, informed by Mehitable as they jogged toward home, was able to acquaint his mother with that which had taken place before his arrival at the Orange inn.

"Indeed, Mistress Ranfield shall hear o' this, forsooth!" exclaimed Mistress Condit indignantly, when he had finished. "I shall lay the matter before Parson Chapman when next he be home from the army. Mistress Ranfield's behavior, and her lack of protection for Hitty, is inexcusable. Oh, these Tory women—one would think they had no hearts! Common humanity should ha' kept her from encouraging such a varlet's actions!"

"Are ye sure she be Tory?" inquired John.

"Aye," answered his mother firmly. "It be common knowledge. She is, besides, a great friend o' the Williams o' the Corners!"

"Ben Williams, the Tory, ye mean?" said John thoughtfully. "Well, that may be so, yet would I take time and think the matter over. Neighbors' quarrels are apt to lead to serious things, indeed, these days."

"Mayhap ye be right, my son," returned Mistress Condit, tightening her arms around Charity. "But it angers me to ha' my little maids——" she choked. "Ah, there is your father—he hath been out upon an errand. We shall hear what he doth think o' Mistress Ranfield's behavior!"

"Welcome home, John!" Samuel Condit said, in pleased surprise, blowing out the candle in the square tin lantern he was carrying, and laying hat and greatcoat hastily down upon perceiving his son by the fire. "What good wind brings ye this way?"

"One which is apt to blow two little maids back again with me whence I came, mayhap," laughed young Doctor Condit, rising to grip his father's hand and indicating the note his mother had once more picked up to peruse.

"First, however, Samuel, I must tell ye what Dame Ranfield did to our Hitty!" burst out Mistress Condit, laying down the note again. Pushing

Charity from her lap, she rose and went to place her hand upon her husband's arm.

"Nay, Mother, let the matter wait," interposed John Condit appealingly, wishing he had not told his mother so soon of the incident, as he realized how four years of warfare had affected her nerves.

"Be quiet, John!" answered Mistress Condit sternly. She turned back to Squire Condit, as her son, chuckling to himself at his mother's tone, subsided meekly upon the bench beside Charity. "Now, Samuel, ye shall hear the tale!"

"Well, Mary," said the Squire soothingly, when she had ended her recital, "no need to rush into trouble. 'Twas a mean thing for the woman to have done—heartless, certainly—yet this warfare hath brought worse things to pass; and since the matter turned out as it did, better to let it drop. It was partly our fault, for an we had not allowed the girls to start off i' the face o' the storm, they need not to ha' been caught thus, and nothing would then ha' happened."

"But the man Hawtree," began Charity tremblingly. "And, oh, Mother, that Jaffray——" She broke off, shuddering.

"Hawtree!" exclaimed her parents and brother together. "Jaffray!" John looked at her, astonished.

"Why did not Hitty tell me those villains were present!" he said angrily.

"Mayhap—she was afraid o' what might happen an she did, John," answered Charity, in her timid way. "Hawtree affected not to know us—I think Jaffray really did not. Mayhap neither did, since it hath been three years or more they were here."

"Strange how war doth bring such villains to light," mused Squire Condit. "That man Jaffray was naught but a river pirate, masking his plunderings beneath the British flag. As for Hawtree, he is but a hanger-on o' the army—booted out, so I heard, from the service o' the enemy. The youth be a newcomer. I do not know him."

"I like it not, their return!" exclaimed Mistress Condit uneasily. "It bodes ill for us and all patriots!"

"Well, let us not worry, my dear," said the Squire reassuringly. And for a moment there was silence in the old kitchen.

The kitchen was the living room of the Condit family, as it was in most of the farmhouses scattered along the foot of the Newark Mountains at this time. There was carried on all the routine of ordinary life; its mud-plastered walls witnessed most of the comedies and many of the tragedies of which family existence was composed, then as now. A big room, it was dwarfed by the enormous fireplace in which Charity, for all her sixteen years, could still stand upright, as well as by the nearness

of the dark, smoked rafters across the low ceiling. Still, with its shining pewter upon the dresser, with a cheerful begonia plant flourishing away at every small-paned window, and the firelight playing over humans and furniture brightly and impartially, it was a room that any one could call Home.

"Father!" Mehitable's eager voice was heard calling down the stairs. The next moment, she entered and hurried to her father's side. "Hast Mother told ye aught o' Cousin Eliza's note?" she asked with shining eyes.

"Nay, not yet. Put down the warming pan, my child!" bade her father. "Take care, Hitty!" He started as Mehitable, turning too hastily toward the fireplace, allowed the hot pan, at the end of its long, clumsy handle, to graze his hand.

"Oh, Father!" She looked at him with such a mixture of alarm and remorse that the Squire had to laugh, so that, relieved, she dumped the live coals back upon the fire, and hanging up the implement, came to his side.

"Cousin - Eliza - who - be - in - Morris - Town - a-visiting - Mistress - Lindsley - hath - asked - Charity - and me - to- stay - wi' - her - because - she - hath - a - broken - ankle," she recited rapidly. "May we, Father?"

The Squire held up his hands helplessly, while the others looked on laughingly. But before he could answer Mehitable, a loud knock sounded

upon the door and reverberated through the house like thunder!

Instantly, the tension of a war-torn country settled upon the kitchen. Faces grew grave and anxious. The poor people never knew whether it was friend or foe who knocked upon their doors in New Jersey in 1779!

CHAPTER III

CHARITY RELATES A FAIRY TALE

"ANSWER the door, John!" said Squire Condit heavily. He did not move from his seat upon the bench beside his wife; but Mehitable saw his eyes travel to the flintlock hanging in its rack upon the wall near by. The next instant, however, the tension was lifted and once more knitting needles gleamed in the firelight and faces smiled, for John, at the door, was greeting someone heartily and drawing him across the threshold.

"Ye remember Sturgins, Mother?" he said inquiringly, turning to Mistress Condit. "I don't know whether or not I told ye he hath been my body servant these many months. Indeed, I cannot rid myself o' the silly fellow!" He laughed as he swung back to the squat, homely little man who, slowly drawing off his woolen tippet, stood with squint-eyed gaze fixed adoringly upon the young doctor.

"Eh! Now, do 'ee e'er be jestin' wi' me, sir!" rumbled Sturgins affectionately. Mehitable thought he resembled a shaggy, unkempt cur

which has been kicked around from pillar to post until, at last, meeting a friendly hand, it attaches itself for ever to the owner of that kindly, careless hand.

"But, ne'ertheless, 'twas Doctor John, here, did save my sight one time I was blinded," continued Sturgins, turning to Mistress Condit with the honest tears starting to his eyes. "Doctor John and no one else!"

"Nonsense! I merely happened to be the first one ye looked at, Sturgins, when ye recovered your sight," said the young doctor frankly. "'Twas my old friend and teacher, Doctor Carter, who had your case forsooth—though now, I mind, ye got your sight back because a fall ye had released some bone pressure which had made ye blind because o' a blow."

"Nay, 'twas ye, sir—no use to tell me otherwise," insisted Sturgins earnestly, stamping the snow from his feet. "And ne'er will I forget, sir!"

"Then, guard him well, Sturgins," interrupted Mistress Condit softly.

"That will I! Wi' my life, mistress!" answered Sturgins solemnly.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed John Condit again, laughing. "What ha' ye there, Sturgins?" He motioned toward a paper in the other's hand.

"Oh!—I 'most forgot, sir! I would forget mine head an it were not fastened well to mine shoul-

ders!" said Sturgins, with a loud, uncouth laugh. He held the paper out to Doctor Condit. "'Twas sent to your quarterings from headquarters, sir!"

No one spoke while the young man ripped open the missive and read it, stooping near the firelight to save lighting a candle.

"Ah, 'tis too bad!" he exclaimed when he was through. "I must return at once, Mother. There be news that His Excellency will soon arrive, wi' his staff, and General Greene desires my immediate presence. Did ye see anything o' Colonel Hamilton, Sturgins?" He turned back to his servant.

"Nay, sir." Sturgins shook his head.

"Mother, will you or Hitty give Sturgins a bite to eat? I will go up to mine room and pack some saddlebags—I know, of old, that there will be fresh linen in the drawer to the highboy!" John looked smilingly at his mother, who rose at once.

"Hitty will find some cold meat and bread," she said kindly. "I will go up wi' ye, my son—there be matters I would discuss wi' ye before ye leave for Morris Town." Her voice died away as she followed the young man upstairs.

Mehitable placed food upon the table and bade Sturgins sit down, then returned to a seat near the fire, for outside the wind could be heard howling, promising colder weather before morning, and making the inglenook seem unusually cozy and warm by its very ferocity.

Presently, Mistress Condit and John returned to the kitchen, the former with the refreshed look upon her face which always came after confidences with her boy, and soon the young doctor and his servant were off upon their long ride to Morris Town.

"Brrr!" shivered Charity, turning away from the open door, where they had all gathered to wave farewell. She ran back to the three-legged stool which she had dragged as near the heat as possible, the others, laughing and shivering, following her. When they were all ensconced once more in the circle around the fireplace that Mistress Condit loved, Charity continued meditatively: "Is it not strange that John did not mention Nancy this time?"

"He did, upstairs—mayhap to evade curious young ears," smiled her mother. "And I gave him the message which came by Mistress Harrison from New York Town, to his great delight."

"Think ye they will e'er be married, Nancy and John?" asked Mehitable impatiently, for it seemed to her, her brother's romance had been dragged out entirely too long. "Our turn should come soon now! Else we shall be old maids, eh, Cherry!"

Mistress Condit glanced sharply at the blooming young face which was bent over the gray knitting; but its innocence satisfied her, and she nodded re-

assuringly at her husband, whose gaze had anxiously followed her own. Mehitable, all unconscious of the little by-play in which she had had the leading rôle, looked up to repeat: "Think ye they e'er will be married, Ma?"

"Of course," answered Mistress Condit serenely. "But Nancy has been loath to leave her invalid mother, who needs her at home—'tis not as though there were a big family there, ye know—and then the war, with all its anxieties! Indeed, 'twould be a rash couple who would set up housekeeping wi' such an uncertain future as the war must produce!"

There was a little silence, then the mother went on: "I have arranged in my mind as to your new gowns, girls."

"How, Mother?" exclaimed Mehitable, vastly excited, though her flying fingers did not pause in their work.

"By using my blue silk gown and the cream-colored one, too. Combined, they ought to make up into two pretty party gowns."

"Oh, Mother!" Charity twisted herself upon the stool to gaze wide-eyed up into her mother's face. Her voice trembled. "Oh, Mother, not—not—*your bride's 'walking-out gowns'!*"

"Aye, Charity." From Mistress Condit's placid face, no one but her hearers could have guessed at the involuntary regret she felt and the very real

sacrifice she was making. "Could I have a better way o' using my wedding clothes than to gi' my two little maids a happy time?" she said. She looked over at her husband. "Ye do not mind my cutting up the two gowns, Samuel?" she asked.

Silently, Squire Condit shook his head in answer. A swift memory of the young and lovely bride who, proudly attired in those same gowns, had walked out to church the first happy Sundays of married life came to him. But, too, there followed swiftly upon the heels of that memory the picture of barefooted men leaving bloody footprints in the virgin snow, of hungry men turning away from the quartermaster's office with half rations—a hunk of bread or a piece of meat; but never both together for days at a time—of a commander, greater than his country realized, pondering sadly, with careworn face, those problems which an unruly Congress hindered rather than helped to solve—all this came to Squire Condit's mind, and he knew that money, even for the most simple party gowns, was not forthcoming in that patriotic household. And that the only way Mehitable and Charity could go properly attired to any rout in Morris Town was as their mother was now planning.

The Squire's eyes, however, were very tender as they rested upon his wife, and he soon took occasion in passing her to pat the work-gnarled hand that held a knitting needle. It was only one of many

humble sacrifices performed in that household, but how cheerfully done!

The next few days were busy ones. Upon the daughters' slender young shoulders fell the mother's household duties, now, for she had to turn seamstress. The two girls felt well rewarded when at last the dainty gowns were finished and hanging upon their wooden pegs in their little chamber beneath the eaves.

"We ought to secure partners easily enough at the routs, an we wear those gowns," said Mehitable, trying to gaze her fill.

"I do not know which one I like the better—yours wi' the blue skirt and the cream overskirt—or mine wi' it otherwise!" sighed Charity happily. But suddenly she shivered, for the little unheated chamber was icy in temperature. "Let us not stay up here longer. An we caught cold, Mother would not let us depart for Morris Town the morrow!"

"We are to leave immediately after midday, I heard our father say," announced Mehitable, shivering also as she followed Charity back to the warmth of the kitchen fire. "Isn't it lucky for us that Cousin Eliza broke her ankle at Morris Town instead of home at Trenton!" she continued naïvely. "Upon what a slender thread oft hangs our fate!"

"You mean, upon what a slippery piece o' ice!" said the literal Charity.

The next day, a gray, wintry one, found them traveling along behind old Dulcie and her team mate, General, in the farm sled. Both girls were yet young enough to enjoy the novelty of sitting upon the blanketed floor, where they shared the comfort of a foot warmer—a small square stove with a handle in its lid that was used at that time to carry to church where, in the cold, unheated pews, the ladies enjoyed its protection against frosted feet. Each girl held a squirrel muff against that portion of her face not covered by her cape hood—they would have stared askance at any one's suggesting that they wear the beautiful feathered bonnets reposing that moment in the bonnet boxes beside them. Their mother's time-worn trunk, which had come from England with her, was tied on as it stood upright behind them, and the slithery, sliding sound whenever the sled went over a bump in the snowy road mingled with Squire Condit's cheerful whistle as he halloed at his horses.

At first, Mehitable's and Charity's gay voices had defied the bitter wind that beat against them; but, as mile after mile was traversed, with snow and yet more snow on every side, they fell silent. Up hill and down dale they went, following the ridge road to Millburn village, skirting the Short Hills, over the incline known as the Sow's Back—where General Washington had established a

beacon signaling station, well fortified by cannon, through the village of Chatham, where the brave Colonel Ford had caught his death cold during a skirmish there, that same Colonel Ford whose fine new house at Morris Town had been selected as headquarters during the coming winter for the commander-in-chief and his staff—past Bottle Hill, and then north to the straight-away road leading from Whippany or Whippanong, as it was then called.

It was growing dusk when Squire Condit looked around from the driver's seat at the huddled figures behind him.

"Wake up, Hitty! Bestir yourself, Cherry lass!" he called in his jolly voice. "We be nearing the end o' our journey, an I mistake not!"

Both girls groaned and stretched. "I vow I can't walk again!" grumbled Mehitable, trying to wriggle her cramped feet beneath the heavy blankets.

"How much farther is it, think ye, Father?" asked Charity wearily. More frail than her older sister, she was ever the first to experience fatigue, though fifteen miles or more in a farm sled was a trip to try a stronger physique than hers.

"Almost there, now!" answered Squire Condit cheerfully. "We shall all be the better for the good supper Mistress Lindsley will doubtless have ready for us!" he added.

"Think ye Cousin Eliza will have secured invitations as yet to any o' the dances?" queried Mehitable, endeavoring to smooth her tumbled black locks with mittened fingers, for even a moment's exposure to the air would have made them ache.

"An she has not, John or Captain Freeman will have done so," answered Charity rather mischievously. And laughed to see the blush that mantled Mehitable's cheek at the last name.

"Indeed, Mistress Smarty, I ha' not e'en heard o' Captain Freeman for a year or more, as ye very well know," retorted Mehitable. "Besides," she interrupted herself to say, "Captain Freeman thinks me yet a babe, I suppose!"

"Well, he would be right—were ye not but fifteen or sixteen when last he saw ye?" admitted Charity, far too quickly to suit Mehitable. "Of course, that was vastly young for twenty-one, Hitty!"

"Indeed, Mother was but sixteen when she was married!" Mehitable tossed her head.

"She says, now, 'twas much too young!" responded Charity promptly. She fell into a reverie, out of which she roused herself with a troubled face. "Hitty," she spoke tremulously, "I ha' been thinking over recently a fairy story Nancy once told me when I was a little girl, that time she did visit our house and she and John had had a quarrel. It was woven around hers and John's story, though,

of course, I did not then know that. But puzzling over it these many years, I ha' solved all its little quirks and points. Would—" she hesitated, hurried on abruptly—"would ye like to hear this fairy story?"

Mehitable, who had been watching her sister's sober face with puzzled eyes, nodded. "An ye want to tell me, Cherry," she said.

"I—I—think ye ought to hear it," answered Charity slowly. She spoke carefully, as though choosing her words. "A—a—friend o' yours was i' the story."

"What part played this friend—the hero's?" laughed Mehitable nervously. But she kept her gaze upon her sister's downcast face, for she felt instinctively that the story was going to displease her in some way, so much had she gathered from Charity's hesitant manner. The younger girl, as Mehitable had often said jokingly, was "cursed with a conscience," and now she felt that her sister had another reason than simply passing the time, in relating this fairy story.

"Nay." Charity shook her head. "John played the hero's rôle and Nancy the heroine's." She waited a second, as though to gather all of her courage together; then, keeping her eyes averted, she plunged into her tale.

"Once upon a time there lived a Princess who

was i' love wi' a Prince from a distant country. The Prince, so Mistress Nancy said, was visiting the Princess's city to study medicine."

"Like John!" interrupted Mehitable. "'Tis easy enough to see Nancy was telling ye her own story."

"Aye," nodded Charity soberly, "easy enough, now, to see that; but not so easy when I was little. Well—'tis thus she told the story. This Princess and the Prince were very happy until another maid from a distant country came a-visiting and she, too—so the Princess thought—fell in love wi' the Prince. She was a flighty maid, not fine and strong and wonderful as was the Prince, not good enough for him; but she had the art o' making young men to like her and one day the Princess caught her own young man, the Prince, smiling at her, walking and talking, too, and she was very angry, then. She said naught, however, and time passed until came the eve o' a masked ball. The Prince told the Princess he would come to that ball masked as Night, in somber garb o' black, so she went as Starlight, in gown o' silver.

"When the Princess arrived, she looked most eagerly around for the Prince, and at last she spied him at the far end of the garden. She knew him at once, despite his mask, for he was the only one i' black. Thus she went to him confidingly; but when she drew near she saw——"

Here, just as Mistress Nancy had once paused to stare unseeingly ahead of her, so Charity stopped and stared, until Mehitable moved impatiently.

"Yes?" said Mehitable. "She saw what?"

"She saw that the Prince was not alone; but walking wi' a lady gowned in silver, prettier e'en than the Princess's own dress. Then as they neared a bower, the Princess knew that this maid was the unworthy one from overseas! They stopped—the Princess was upon them, for she had been hurrying toward them—and then she saw the Prince stoop and kiss this unworthy maid and heard him whisper, 'I love you!'"

"Oh!" Mehitable's voice was shocked, just as Charity's had been that long-ago time when poor Mistress Nancy's voice had trembled and she had caught the little girl to her, so that the rest of the story had come tumbling to its end through Charity's fair curls.

"But, you see," went on Charity's voice now, as she sat with her eyes fixed carefully upon the hands she was clasping so nervously in her lap, "you see, Hitty, the story ended much nicer—for Nancy—than she knew at that time it would. For the masker i' black was *not* the Prince! Someone had borrowed his mask suit o' black—it seems he, himself, had been called out upon a case o' sickness at the last minute—and this *other* man had kissed the unworthy maid."

There was a little silence, then Mehitable spoke very low: "Who—was—the other—man?" she asked, her young face rather pale and strained, for all the whipping of the wind upon her cheeks.

"Don't ye remember?" Charity turned and looked at her sister suddenly. "Don't ye remember how Nancy's and John's misunderstanding was straightened out at last? It seems——" Again Charity hesitated.

"It seems?" Mehitable repeated it in a whisper, her eyes upon the other's face.

"It seems that Captain Anthony Freeman was the man who borrowed John's mask suit that night," Charity told her quietly. And silence fell.

Now the road led through deep forest. Ghostly shadows turned out to be stark, winter-stripped trees over and over, yet the primeval solitude, the dusk, and the war all made even Squire Condit's gaze very alert as he glanced from side to side, urging his horses into a trot that caused the old sled to creak and to clatter in aged protest.

It was when they had reached the utmost depths of the forest that Mehitable, glancing back over the snowy road, uttered a startled exclamation.

"Father—back there—do ye see?"

The Squire glanced over his shoulder. Dim figures, barely discernible through the twilight, were galloping after the sled.

"Zounds!" he muttered more to himself than to

Mehitable. "I like not to be caught in the woods thus!"

"What mean ye?" Mehitable's heart began to flutter. There was something ominous in those flying figures which, little by little, gained upon the sled.

Charity's hand grasped Mehitable's arm through its thick fold of cape. "Think you our father fears Indians?" she whispered.

"Nay, not Indians, Cherry! I fear," Mehitable gave another terrified look at the rapidly approaching horsemen, "I fear he thinks they be *red-coats!*"

CHAPTER IV

THE POWDER MILL

"THE red-coats!" Charity's face paled. "Yet are we not too near the American encampment to be molested by the British? Would they dare pursue us this far from their own base on Staten Island?" she whispered presently.

"The red-coats would dare anything!" returned Mehitable fiercely. "Besides, mayhap they be lone Tories, out to see what mischief they can bestow on honest patriots!"

But presently, straining her gaze backward over the twilight-lit road, she uttered a cry, half hysterical, half joyful.

"Father! Father! 'Tis John, not red-coats, pursuing us! I vow 'tis John and another man!" And at that instant, as though to confirm his sister's words, John Condit's voice could indeed be heard hailing them.

Squire Condit promptly pulled his horses to a standstill, and taking out his kerchief, wiped away the perspiration that was streaming down his brow.

"I' faith!" he ejaculated angrily. "It seems a

pity the boy should ha' thus played such a trick upon us! How now, sirrah!" He greeted his son irately as that young man rode up behind them laughingly. "What mean ye by frightening your sisters thus! 'Tis not my idea o' a jest!"

"Nay, Father, be not angry!" apologized Doctor Condit, the mirth dying out of his eyes as he saw how seriously the three travelers were upset. He rode his horse close to the side of the sled and snatched a kiss from Charity, who was still trembling. "Poor little maid!" he said remorsefully. "We thought to stop you at the junction o' the roads back yonder," he continued in explanation, turning back to his father. "When we saw ye not, we thought we had missed you until Tony, here—ye remember Captain Freeman, do ye not, Hitty?—until Tony spied you ahead o' us. Then, all unwittingly, we galloped after the sled."

"And a most desperate gallop it was!" added Captain Freeman, laughingly riding forward in turn to greet Squire Freeman and his daughters.

The three responded to him in various ways: Squire Condit in a hearty manner, for he liked the young man who was his son's friend; Charity agitatedly offered him her hand with a surreptitious glance at Mehitable as she did so, while that young lady, to Captain Freeman's obvious surprise, bestowed upon him only a frigid little bow. Puzzled, he glanced at her more than once during the rest

of the journey into Morris Town, for he and Mehitable had parted the best of friends three years ago.

Squire Condit reined in his horses at last before a comfortable-looking farmhouse whose great chimneys at either end gave it an air of hospitality and welcome which the hostess, Mistress Lindsley, verified by her friendly smile as soon as she opened the door. But, indeed, the whole place, with its tidy fence, its sprucely trimmed trees, its neat field-stone-walled well with the long well sweep, its kitchen ell offering two additional windows in the house front, added grace to her greeting, while the candlelight, streaming out through the window-panes beside her, dispersed the cold gray shadows without and seemed to urge them to hasten within.

Mehitable, helped to the ground by her brother, turned to follow Charity up the walk to where Mistress Lindsley stood outlined against the light in her wide doorway. But she found her path blocked and Captain Freeman standing there, his three-cornered hat in his hand.

"Nay, Mistress Hitty, can we not part more cordially than this?—for John and I must go on to our own quartering. Why, what hath become o' the little friend who waved to me o'er the fence when I rode away three years ago?" he asked reproachfully, as Squire Condit drove his horses toward the barn, and John, passing them, ran up

to pay his respects to Mistress Lindsley before going on.

Alone beneath the dusky wintry sky, Mehitable looked up at the handsome, wistful face bending eagerly toward her and opened her lips to speak. A rush of generosity, of forgiveness enveloped her. After all, what had this young man's, or any other young man's, philanderings to do with her! Surely friendship was made of better stuff than of doubt and distrust and suspicion. But glancing up, at this point, into Captain Freeman's dark eyes, she saw—was it an amused twinkle, a condescending, what-a-silly-little-maid-yet-must-I-humor-her expression?

Back came the anger and the injured pride and the real shock which the ending of Charity's fairy tale had aroused in her, so that, instead of answering him, she closed her lips tightly together, a thin, straight line of prim disapproval. Then, giving him a level look, she stepped around him and pursued her way with dignity up the path.

It was too bad that the young man, standing where she had left him to stare after her with amazed, angry eyes, could not have seen the tears which sprang to her own and the trembling lips which she was endeavoring to steady before coming into the yellow circle of light thrown by the open doorway. Perhaps, if he had, he might not have strode back to his horse, a moment later, with such

stern tread, or, mounting abruptly, have ridden away so furiously into the twilight!

As for Mehitable, tremulously returning Mistress Lindsley's greeting and straining her ears to hear the last of those retreating hoof-beats, she was filled with a mixture of feelings and hardly knew what she was saying. Her relief was proportionate when, bidding farewell to John Condit, who left then, Mistress Lindsley caught up a candle which had been sputtering upon a table behind her and led the way through a dark hall and a series of small, ill-planned rooms into a big, bright kitchen, full of goodly odors, warm with firelight, and reassuring with its promise of supper upon a long, candle-lit table in the center of the room. Mehitable found, then, given a few precious seconds to regain her self-possession, she could enter the kitchen her own smiling, debonaire self.

"Well," said Mistress Lindsley, "your cousin will indeed be glad to see ye! Poor thing, she hath been much alone, so busy are we wi' the baking we must do for His Excellency, who hath now arrived at the headquarters."

"Do ye indeed bake His Excellency's bread?" asked Mehitable, with a sort of awe in her voice.

Mistress Lindsley laughed as she motioned to her young guests to remove their capes and mittens and tippets and advance to the fire. "I do hate to disappoint ye first thing," she replied dryly,

"yet truth compels me to admit we bake only for his guard, General Washington having his own cook at Mistress Ford's. But the guard contains two hunderd and fifty men, so we are kept busy, you see."

"Two hundred and fifty!" Mehitable's jaw dropped. "Why, where do they all sleep? Surely Mistress Ford's house—fine and large as I ha' heard it to be—is not that large!"

Again their hostess laughed. "The guard sleep across the lane from headquarters in huts which have been built for them," she answered.

"What about the rest o' the army? What do the soldiers do for bread?" asked Mehitable inquisitively.

Mistress Lindsley sighed. "There has been much suffering for lack o' bread and already mutinies," she returned sadly. "A good patriot, Christopher Ludwick, was appointed by Congress to take care o' the matter; but always he hath been handicapped by the army not remaining long enough in one place to erect his ovens to bake the bread and afterward, too, he hath had difficulties in getting the bread delivered to the troops. Too, hundreds of pounds of bread, fresh from Master Ludwick's ovens, once delivered, hath been allowed to spoil upon the ground, exposed to noonday sun or night damp, because an officer hath not been properly assigned to care for it, I've heard. 'Tis

also common report that poor Master Ludwick hath been expending his private means to pay his bakers, money he made from his gingerbread business before the war, and that he hath lost much because, before he was reimbursed by the military paymasters, our Continental currency did depreciate!"

"What a pity!" ejaculated tender-hearted Charity.

"Is it not!" nodded Mistress Lindsley. "The men," she continued, "drew rations o' flour for awhile and baked their own hard bread—for only the officers like soft bread, it seems; but now a company o' bakers, to help Master Ludwick out, hath been raised in Boston Town, under John Torrey, and ovens hath been erected at Springfield, Massachusetts, in addition to those here. Yet," Mistress Lindsley shook her head pessimistically, "I've heard, too, this hath been costly, that Master Torrey, though well-meaning, hath been bewildered by his difficulties. Time alone can tell what will happen. Ah, Tabitha," she interrupted herself to glance toward the inglenook beyond the fireplace, "wilt not leave your bashful corner and come welcome our young guests?"

A sweet-faced, quiet-looking young girl, at whom Mehitable and Charity had been glancing askance ever since they had entered, got up at this and advanced to them. Giving them a little work-

roughened hand, she bade them welcome in a low voice.

"Tabitha be staying here to help me," said Mistress Lindsley, smiling at her. "Ah, Squire Condit," she turned toward the door which led into the side yard, "I hope ye be planning to stay overnight?"

"Your health, mistress!" Entering briskly, Squire Condit bowed low over the hand Mistress Lindsley gave him. "An it would not inconvenience ye," he went on, straightening himself and glancing involuntarily toward the supper table. His long ride had given him a sharp appetite.

"Nay—rather would we rest better this night to have once more a man i' the house," responded Mistress Lindsley cordially. "It hath been a trial to have Major Lindsley away, for all they say the red-coats would not dare venture into Morris Town. Still, ye never can tell, and I be nervous!"

Squire Condit threw out his chest. "Indeed, mistress," he answered encouragingly, "ye need not be nervous this night an I remain!"

Here, his daughters' glances crossed mischievously, Mehitable, indeed, almost giggling as she remembered the perturbed glances her father had cast over his shoulder that afternoon at the pursuing figures he had not recognized as John's and Anthony Freeman's, and the perspiration, though it was a bitter cold day, he had afterward wiped

away. They said nothing, however, being dutiful daughters—not many children criticized their parents in those days!—and a moment later all moved toward the supper table at Mistress Lindsley's invitation.

"Ye must be well-nigh starved," said their hostess hospitably. "What is it, my child?" For Charity had remained standing uncertainly beside her chair.

"Would ye greatly mind," hesitated Charity, "if I asked first to see dear Cousin Eliza, mistress? I know she must have heard our arrival, and it be hard to lie waiting—I know, for once I was very ill, too."

"And may I also be excused?" exclaimed Mehitable, springing to her feet and wondering why she had not thought of her cousin, lying helpless upstairs.

"Nay, sit ye down, Cherry! You, too, Hitty lass!" bade the Squire frowningly. "Your suppers will be cold, forsooth, an ye go, now! Cousin Eliza minds not waiting, I am sure!"

"May they not go for one moment, Squire Condit?" begged Mistress Lindsley unexpectedly. "Indeed, 'tis sweet o' you, child, to remember. Poor Lizzie—I did forget she was waiting upstairs to see her little cousins!"

"Aye, since ye ask it, they may go," consented the Squire, his mouth full of venison pie. "For-

sooth," he added, "this be wondrous tasty! Is it rabbit or chicken or what, an I may ask?"

"It be venison, sir," smiled his hostess. "One o' the neighbors shot a buck up Dover village way. We have very little game hereabouts, since the army took up encampment here in Morris Town, for the soldiers, poor, hungry fellows," she paused and sighed, "ha' already scoured our woods. Won't ye ha' more o' the pastry?" she urged, shoving the dish toward him and well knowing that such a treat was not often available in Mistress Condit's frugal, patriotic household.

"Thank'ee, madam, I don't care an I do!" returned the Squire hungrily, feeling as though it were a holiday, as holidays had been celebrated before the war with a feast of good things.

Mehitable and Charity, meanwhile, had followed Tabitha upstairs. "Mistress Lindsley said your name was Tabitha?" said Mehitable inquiringly.

"Aye." The girl nodded over the candle she was carrying. "But folks mostly call me Tabbie."

"As they call me Hitty and they do Charity by the name o' Cherry," returned Mehitable, laughing. "Well, Tabbie," she went on saucily, when they had reached a door beneath which showed a gleam of light, "an ye return to the supper table, see that Father does not eat up all the meat pie, for I be ravenously hungry, while Cherry, here, is a monstrous eater!"

"Hitty, how can ye!" protested her embarrassed sister, glancing sidelong at Tabitha.

"Now, Cherry, deny it not! Be truthful, be honest!" insisted the tease. Then, as Tabitha smilingly promised to save them their share of supper, Mehitable pulled her face to solemn length, for sympathy, and tiptoed into Cousin Eliza's sick room after Charity. To her enormous relief, however, they found the invalid reading by the light of a candle and not at all inclined to be self-pitying, as she took off her narrow spectacles and greeted them in a cheerful voice.

"Welcome to Morris Town, my dears!" she said affectionately. "So ye did remember your old coz!" Giving them a smooth, fragrant cheek to kiss, she patted their hands with a tiny, ring-ladened one, for she was a very fine lady, indeed, who had never known work as the girls' mother, her cousin, had. "Methought ye but now arrived! Have ye supped thus quickly?"

"Not yet," answered honest Mehitable.

"It does not matter, indeed," began the more polite Charity.

"But it does!" replied Cousin Eliza. She waved them away. "Good-night, little maids! Greet your father for me and tell him I hope to see him e'er he departs the morrow." She nodded at them smilingly. "Mistress Lindsley was hoping he would plan to stay the night, so that she might

rest in peace. Poor woman—she generally sleeps i' mortal fear o' a British raid, because o' the powder mill so close by!"

"Powder mill?" Interested at once, Mehitable turned back at the door. But her cousin, clapping a hand over her mouth, waved at her silently, and the girl, sensing that the other had told more than she should have, ran down the narrow stairs after Charity. Seated at the supper table, however, Mehitable did not scruple to ask about the powder mill, for Cousin Eliza's words had aroused her wildest curiosity.

Mistress Lindsley glanced around the room uneasily before answering, and when she spoke, she did so in a lowered voice, as though she feared her words might escape to listening Tory ears outside the closed windows.

"Aye, there be a powder mill on the Whippanong River i' the woods behind us," she admitted. "Colonel Ford and his father built it about three years ago. Colonel Benoni Hathaway be in charge, wi' my husband acting as his assistant when he is home. I must warn ye, however"—she turned solemnly to her wide-eyed young guests who, too interested to eat, hungry though they were, were staring at her, breathless—"I must warn ye that no one knows the mill's whereabouts, so hidden is its site i' the woods, and *no one must know*—for Tories and red-coats—aye, we have

occasional spies, Squire—while they may know o' its existence, yet are unaware o' its location. That be why, ye understand, I am e'er nervous at night, with Joseph away, for any attack o' the British will naturally be aimed at the headquarters or—the powder mill!"

"Oh," exclaimed Mehitable, "what a lovely spot! Think o't, Cherry—spies and the powder mill and —and—the routs we are to attend! 'Tis too heavenly to be true!" She sighed ecstatically.

They all joined in the Squire's burst of laughter, even the quiet Tabitha, who chuckled over the stocking she was knitting at the girl who liked such a conglomeration of things.

As Mistress Lindsley predicted, everyone slept soundly that night, and early the next morning Squire Condit headed his team and the farm sled toward home.

"Tell our mother we be thinking o' her," begged Charity wistfully, evincing a desire to linger near her father.

"And tell her not to forget to water my plants!" Mehitable called after him when he departed. The Squire nodded and smiled, and his two daughters waved to him until he was out of sight and then turned back in rather a homesick fashion toward the house.

They were met at the kitchen door by Mistress

Lindsley, whose face was drawn into a worried expression.

"Hitty," she said abruptly, "a heavy package arrived but now for Colonel Hathaway from headquarters, and the messenger returned at once. Now, Colonel Hathaway be over at the powder mill, and the package requires two people to carry it, for it is heavy. I cannot leave my bread, which is still i' the oven. Think you"—she looked at Mehitable hesitatingly—"think you, you could help Tabbie carry it to the mill?"

"Oh, indeed and I could, Mistress Lindsley!" Mehitable followed her joyfully into the kitchen, where Tabitha was already donning her heavy cardinal. "Don't you want to come, too, Cherry?" she asked, loath to have her sister miss any of the fun.

But Charity shrank back in dismay. "Nay," she faltered. "Why, the old powder mill might blow up while I was there! Oh, Hitty, do not go!" she whispered imploringly, when Mistress Lindsley's back was turned. "I like it not! Suppose a Tory caught ye going thither! He might shoot ye!"

Mehitable laughed at her. "Little silly!" she murmured affectionately. "Stay you here wi' Cousin Eliza, then! Indeed, I would not miss this trip for worlds!"

Chattering blithely in the bright, cold sunshine, Mehitable and Tabitha soon emerged from the Lindsley house and wended their way toward the secret place of the mill. They carried the package between them, suspended from a long wooden stick that the Morris Town girl produced, each end of which rested upon a thin girlish shoulder. Tabitha, looking carefully around, at last held up her hand for silence, then she struck off from the narrow wagon trail, which led toward the river, into an almost impenetrable thicket. Mehitable, struggling along after her, trying to protect her eyes from the vicious back-springing branches and receiving a dozen scratches while so doing, trying, too, to keep the awkward bundle they were carrying from sliding along its stick into Tabitha, thought, whimsically, that Charity had been the wiser of the two, after all. But when they had fought their way beyond the thicket into a small open space, and had traversed to the very door of the mysterious mill, she caught her breath with excitement and would not have exchanged places with Charity if she could have.

She was doomed to disappointment about seeing the interior of the mill, however, for a man answered their knock and stopped them upon the threshold and though he thanked them courteously, they were not invited to enter. Tabitha, apparently used to this treatment, turned quietly

back toward the thickets to retrace her steps; but Mehitable, as soon as she had retreated to a safe distance, vented her ire in words.

"In good sooth, they take a maid's service for granted here, Tabbie!" she exclaimed with a low, angry laugh.

Tabitha, crawling along through the underbrush, glanced around at her in mild surprise. "What did ye expect, Hitty?" she asked soothingly.

"I expected, at least, to be invited to inspect the powder mill and see how they made gunpowder!" retorted Mehitable, dodging an especially vicious briar which, though stripped and dried by wintry winds, could yet deal wounds with its thorns. "After carrying the heavy package to them through—through this awful place!" she added bitterly.

"Nay!" Tabitha's voice was shocked. "They cannot stop to dance attendance upon chance visitors, these men who work here, Hitty! Why," she went on earnestly, "surely ye know that most, if not all, o' the gunpowder used by our Continental Army in New Jersey is made i' this very mill!"

There was huffy silence upon Mehitable's part; but she was too sunshiny of temper to sulk long, and at last her better nature came to the fore.

"I vow ye be right, Tabbie," she said then, good-naturedly. "Have ye ne'er been in the mill, then?"

"Nay," answered Tabitha firmly. "No woman has, to my knowledge, save, mayhap, Mistress Lindsley!" And the two girls fell silent, Tabitha because she was naturally so, and Mehitable because of astonishment at the lack of feminine curiosity in Morris Town.

But, after a little, turning to glance back through the thickets as they proceeded down the bank of the river, where a barge, loaded with barrels, was frozen into the ice, Mehitable exclaimed in a low voice and clutched Tabitha to an abrupt standstill.

"Hawtree!" she gasped, pointing.

Tabitha stared at her. "Hawtree?" she repeated in astonishment. "What mean ye, Hitty?"

"There!" Mehitable's finger still pointing wildly, Tabitha followed its direction with her eyes, and in doing so, caught a glimpse of a cruel, crafty face just disappearing among the thickets on the opposite bank. "Hawtree is a Tory!" Mehitable was wringing her hands now. "Oh, what a pity—I saw him counting the barrels on yon barge!—what a pity for him to be able to carry news o' their number to the British and there dispose o' such information at his own price!"

But Tabitha smiled quietly. "Can ye keep a secret, Hitty?" she demanded. At Mehitable's wondering nod, she smiled again triumphantly. "The information concerning the output o' the

mill on yon barge, while it may earn your Tory spy his unworthy fee, will help instead o' hinder our cause! Those barrels be loaded wi' sand instead o' gunpowder, as is Colonel Hathaway's practice, as I happen to be almost the only one to know—I heard him and Major Lindsley talking by chance o' the matter one time when I approached the mill—'tis thus he deceives the enemy! The larger they think our supply o' powder, the less apt they are to attack us here."

Tabitha's voice died away, but the next instant it was her turn to cry out.

"Oh, Hitty"—trembling, she, too, pointed across the little river—"I saw—I saw the face o' a *savage!*"

This time it was Mehitable's eyes which followed Tabitha's pointing finger. "Gray Hawk! It must be Gray Hawk!" she cried. "Ah, then," her hands flew to her heart and she turned a pale face toward the other girl, "then danger must be lurking near! Ever Gray Hawk appears when danger threatens! Come, we had best depart! Mayhap, danger is threatening e'en while we stand here!" And, hurriedly, she struck back through the thickets toward the rough wagon trail she knew now led from the Lindsley house to the powder mill.

"Who is Gray Hawk?" demanded Tabitha, almost querulously, stumbling after her. "Ye be so queer wi' your 'Hawtrees' and your 'Gray

Hawks'! Indeed, I like not such mysteries! One would think we were out i' the wilderness instead o' right here i' Morris Town!"

Mehitable, her eyes resting at last upon the reassuring protection of Mistress Lindsley's house, slackened her hastening steps momentarily.

"Nay, I meant not to anger ye, Tabbie, by not telling ye at once who Gray Hawk is," she said apologetically. "He is John's 'blood brother'—an Indian who, since the beginning o' the war, because o' certain Indian rites he and John performed together, call themselves so. And he it hath been who hath watched o'er our family because John could not be home to do so. More than once"—Mehitable's voice grew tremulous with real gratitude—"he hath rescued me, hath Gray Hawk!"

The two girls fell silent. Safety near, it was a temptation not to break into a run for shelter. They walked along quickly, however, and both were panting when they burst into the kitchen. But they said nothing about their adventures, having agreed to this by mutual consent for fear of making Mistress Lindsley more nervous than she was.

After supper that evening, Tabitha donned her cardinal and, somewhat to the sisters' surprise, bade them farewell.

"I be going home to take care o' my aunt, who

be ill," she explained, in her sober voice. "I usually live wi' my aunt, both mine parents being deceased."

"Are ye not afraid, then, to go through the dark, Tabbie?" asked Mehitable significantly, glancing, with a repressed shudder, through the black square that was the window.

But smilingly Tabitha shook her head. "Nay, why should I be afraid to walk along village lanes that I have known all my life?" she asked gently. "'Tis only the unknown which terrifies, Hitty."

"Well, we hope your aunt will soon be recovered, Tabbie, and that ye will be back here wi' us once more," responded Mehitable cordially, echoed, as usual, by Charity.

Mistress Lindsley had already retired when the girls, having barred the heavy door after Tabitha, went slowly upstairs. Unconsciously, as they left the warmth of the kitchen behind, their steps quickened. They peeped into their Cousin Eliza's room; but finding her asleep, with the firelight playing upon her placid face, they went on to their room and soon they, too, were donning nightcaps and climbing into their high feather bed. There, after a few desultory giggles, convulsive wriggles, pokes, and various bits of girlish gossip, they fell asleep, and all was silent in Mistress Lindsley's house.

It seemed hours later that Mehitable awoke. She jerked straight out of her first sound sleep into the awful, strained, listening attention which an unexpected or a seemingly inexplicable noise can produce at night.

"Cherry!" Mehitable, resting cautiously upon one elbow, leaned over and put her lips to her sister's ears. "Cherry," she said noiselessly, "wake up!"

Charity uttered a little moan, shifted her position. "No, no," she muttered incoherently. "Stop tickling, Hitty! Ugh—le' me 'lone!"

"Cherry!" Mehitable shook her desperately. "Oh, please waken, Cherry!"

Charity, in answer, rolled over upon her back, stretched, yawned, adjusted the nightcap Mehitable had disarranged in whispering to her, and with that, became awake.

"What is it, Hitty?" she asked then. Receiving no answer save a spasmodic clutch from Mehitable, she, too, started up, and they both sat motionless in bed, shivering from cold and fear.

At that instant, their door opened, and Mistress Lindsley entered hurriedly. She was a comical-looking figure, with her curl-papers sticking out from beneath her nightcap, with her shadow dancing grotesquely on the wall behind her from the candle she carried as she advanced upon the girls' bed. But grim tragedy stalked at her heels,

peeped out of her staring eyes, spoke in her gasping voice.

"Ge—get up!" she stammered. "The—the—the house be surrounded! We are attacked! *The—the—red-coats have—have come!*"

CHAPTER V

IN THE NIGHT

"THE red-coats! Nay, are ye sure, mistress?" exclaimed Mehitable valiantly.

Springing out of bed, she began to dress hastily, stopping every now and then to listen for a repetition of the sounds which had frightened her. Charity crept out on to the icy floor, shuddering and shaking with a nervous chill. Mehitable, noticing this, bade her go in and dress by their Cousin Eliza's fire; but warned her not to waken the sick woman.

"Aye, Hitty," returned Mistress Lindsley, after a pause. She stood motionless, as though petrified by fear, her head bent in an attitude of agonized listening, "Aye, can ye not hear them?" she whispered, with a strange sort of triumph. And now Mehitable had to admit that she could, that the sounds which came from the yard below were real sounds and not those of an overwrought imagination.

Men's voices, hushed yet vibrant with excitement, the trampling of horses' hoofs, the rattle and clash of muskets—these made their blood run cold

At last, Mehitable could stand it no longer. Blowing out Mistress Lindsley's candle, she crept to the window which, inch by inch, she shoved up. Then, poking out her head, despite her hostess's whispered pleas not to, she stared down through the black darkness. When she gazed around at the older woman, who had come close, her blanched face gleamed white.

"I could not see, but 'tis a score or more below, I'm sure!" she said dully, in answer to the other's terrified question. "Are we—lost, think ye?"

At that moment came a tremendous knocking, echoing through the silent house. It was the imperative clatter of a sword-hilt upon the front door.

"Open!" cried a man's voice. "Open—in—— name!"

"What did he say?" muttered Mistress Lindsley, her breathing terrified.

"'Twas a mumble to me—something about a name!" said Mehitable.

"So I heard!" said Mistress Lindsley brusquely, because of her fright. "Oh, me! oh, me!" she wrung her hands. "If only Joseph were here!"

She started nervously as someone appeared, that instant, in the doorway; but it was only Charity—albeit a trembling, pale-cheeked Charity.

"Oh, Mistress Lindsley, what be ye a-going to do?" gasped the latter. "Cousin Eliza is awake," she added more calmly. "She says to open the

door to the rogues and she will try to buy our safety by offering them her jewels!"

As Charity spoke, again came that brutal knocking. Typically the domineering British, Mehitable thought! She looked an inquiry at Mistress Lindsley, whose face, poor woman, even in the yellow candlelight, showed gray and shocked.

"Aye—open—the—door, Hitty!" said Mistress Lindsley, catching her breath. "We—we be lost, I fear! I do not think jewels will buy our safety after the—the way the British have shown us they can pillage, burn, murder!" Her words died away into a dreadful silence as she gazed ahead of her in stony despair.

Charity uttered a stifled cry as Mehitable started courageously toward the stairs. "Nay, let me go, Hitty!" she choked, running after her and attempting to pass her. "Let me open the door! They might bayonet you!"

Mehitable raised her arm and barred the younger girl's way. "Think you I could look our mother in the face an I hid behind your petticoats, Cherry?" she demanded sternly. "Nay, little sister," she looked down at the other with tender gaze, although the white, strained line around her own mouth and nostrils showed her dreadful fright, "I will ope the door!"

But Mistress Lindsley, attracted by their low-voiced words, came toward them swiftly. "Nay,

Hitty—I did not think!" She parted them gently and went through the bedroom door. "I will ope the door, of course. It is my place to do so!" And the two girls dared not argue with her, because of the command in her tone.

They followed her down the stairs, however, step by step, for Mistress Lindsley went slowly, clinging as though for support against the wall as she went.

"An—an—they bayonet us, as—as—Mistress Lindsley thinks—they—might," whispered Mehitable to Charity between stiffened lips, "think—o' the soldiers—who—die for their—country!"

"Aye, Hitty!" answered Charity, her head up. And the rest of that slow, awful journey down the stairs there marched as brave gentlewomen as ever trod the path of danger.

A struggle with the heavy bar of the door. Another one with the great key—fully six inches long—in the lock. And Mistress Lindsley had flung open the door.

There was an instant of silence, then a courteous voice spoke out of the darkness.

"Pardon, mistress—is this Major Lindsley's house?"

Mistress Lindsley nodded mechanically, then realizing that her nod could not be seen, perhaps, for she had left the candle upstairs, she spoke huskily.

"Aye, sir!" She cleared her throat. "Aye," she repeated heavily.

"Then, mistress, we are under orders," the voice out of the darkness continued, "we are ordered to——"

"To seize the house, I suppose, sirrah!" finished Mistress Lindsley, coming suddenly out of her daze of misery. She snapped defiant fingers. "To murder innocent women and children as ye have so oft done before!"

"But—but—madam," began the voice—rather astonished, Mehitable thought.

"To burn and pillage and commit what terrible crimes in the name o' warfare ye best wot of!" swept on Mistress Lindsley, now fully aroused. She barred her doorway dramatically. "But ye shall not enter here, except over my dead body!"

"Mistress, I——" the voice tried again.

"Except, I say, over my fallen body!" cried Mistress Lindsley. Suddenly she screamed. "Run, Hitty, run! The way be open at the rear, mayhap!"

Mehitable, however, was too transfixed by terror and excitement to move, and the next instant Mistress Lindsley was gently but firmly shoved to one side.

"Is there any one in the house *not* hysterical?" demanded a desperate voice. "This poor lady be either demented or overcome by fright!"

Mehitable, at that, sprang forward and helped to support the half-fainting figure of her hostess. Between her and the young soldier who, entering then, had caught the lady as she had reeled, they carried her into the kitchen where they laid her down upon a bench. Straightening her back in the firelight, Mehitable saw, instead of the hated red, another color beneath the greatcoat of the man confronting her.

"Why," she stammered, "wh—why, ye are not red-coats!"

Before the young soldier could speak, a cry came from the door. There was a rush of little feet across the kitchen floor, a flurry of homespun skirts, and Mehitable blinked her eyes. For there was Charity standing with her hands caught in those of the young soldier, with her happy face uplifted to his in glad welcome, with broken words trembling upon her lips. Mehitable stared and blinked again. Then she, too, exclaimed with delight, and leaving Mistress Lindsley's side, ran across the room to where the other two were hurling excited questions at each other.

She was unnoticed. Neither turned at her approach, and rather taken aback, she stood silently watching them for a moment. Then the lad—for he was not much more than that—in swinging toward the door, as he remembered that his men were waiting out in the cold, stumbled over her.

He grasped her hands, then, and pumped them up and down.

"Well, well!" he beamed. "'Tis you, Hitty! John told me naught o' your intended visit to Morris Town!"

"Forsooth, Young Cy," returned Mehitable dryly, looking over her and Charity's old playmate and neighbor with affectionate eyes, however, "I thought, mayhap, ye'd decided I was but another chair or table or something!"

"Nay, Hitty, ye jest!" said Young Cy, blushing. "I was but greeting Cherry—it has been so long since I saw you—her, I mean—you—you—understand."

"Aye, I understand!" thought Mehitable, looking after him as, blushing more than ever, Young Cy rushed away. She went over to Mistress Lindsley, beside whom Charity was already kneeling.

"What—Americans!" Mistress Lindsley was saying in a bewildered manner. She sat up, shaken and trembling. "They be not red-coats, ye say, Cherry?"

"Nay, dear Mistress Lindsley, they are a few of His Excellency's guard sent down from headquarters," responded Charity soothingly.

"Then there must be danger o' attack from the red-coats, an we are to be protected!" groaned Mistress Lindsley, passing a dazed hand over her brow.

"But think how much better we'll feel an the guard be near!" encouraged Charity. She got to her feet. "I think I had better go upstairs and appraise poor Cousin Eliza o' our relief!"

"Now, why could not I have been the one to think o' doing that!" murmured Mehitable to herself. "Here have I been standing like a great stupid, with never a thought o' poor Cousin Eliza lying frightened upstairs!"

She was about to follow Charity, after assuring herself that Mistress Lindsley was over her fright, when Young Cy, looking tall and handsome without the greatcoat, which he had removed and was carrying over his arm, reëntered the kitchen. After his first eager glance had told him that Charity was no longer present, he seemed to be able to turn his mind to other business, and looked worriedly at Mehitable.

"Know ye aught o' the powder mill's whereabouts, Hitty?" he asked in a low voice. "'Tis that I be sent to watch. I find, upon questioning my men, that no one is present who can lead us thither. I, myself, but recently arrived in Morris Town, do not know how to reach it!"

Mehitable hesitated. It seemed strange to her that General Washington could have sent out a guard for such an important building as the powder mill without adequate and explicit directions for reaching it. Had Young Cy been a stranger to

her, she would have doubted him, perhaps even dubbed him spy, and would have defended the secret of the powder mill's location to the best of her ability. But knowing him as she did, she was sure he was telling the truth.

Mistress Lindsley, however, busily lighting the candles in their tin holders on the chimney-shelf, now turned around.

"The powder mill, sir?" She looked at Young Cy very keenly as she came forward and in her eyes Mehitable read suspicion, which at once became spoken words. "It seems not right that His Excellency should have sent a man in charge o' such an expedition who did not know how to reach his destination," she remarked unbelievingly.

Young Cy's cheeks flushed, and he drew himself up. Mehitable had to grant him both dignity and manly charm as he looked his questioner straight in the eye.

"It be true, nevertheless, madam. I am the officer in charge o' this guard, and I do admit my ignorance how to reach our destination," he answered, his firm young voice trembling a little with anger. "I understood from His Excellency that Major Lindsley would lead us thence!"

Mistress Lindsley, at that, bit her lip. "Mayhap ye be right, young sir," she admitted, after a pause. "Major Lindsley is absent from home just now upon personal business, of which His Excel-

lency may not have been informed, which would account for his so telling ye what he did."

Mehitable started forward impetuously. "Nay, I can vouch for Young Cy! Why, he has been our friend at home since—since we played mud pies together!" she exclaimed, with a little breathless laugh. "I know that he—and his father, also—be true patriots!"

Both she and Young Cy stood for a moment with their gaze riveted anxiously upon Mistress Lindsley's face until she turned to him with sudden disarming graciousness.

"Ye must pardon a nervous, suspicious woman, sir," she apologized frankly. "I will lead ye and your guard to the powder mill."

Mehitable sprang after her. "Let me lead them!" she begged. "Nay, why should you expose yourself this night to cold and darkness when I am young and strong! I know the way—Tabbie did show me, ye mind!"

Mistress Lindsley hesitated with her hand upon her cape, as it hung upon its peg behind the door. "But you were only there once, my child. I fear ye would find it hard to retrace your steps at night an it is dark!"

But Mehitable begged so hard that she at last yielded, and a moment or so later, the young girl was out beneath the starless heavens. Straight as a fox to his lair she led Young Cy and his men,

although there was a pause at the start while the young officer protested at her walking ahead of his horse.

"I cannot find the way, otherwise," Mehitable explained patiently.

"I like it not!" Young Cy shook his head. "To let you walk while I ride, Hitty! It seems like a man and his slave! Yet must I take my horse and the men must have theirs, in case o' sudden attack!"

"Of course!" Mehitable started off. "Do not be foolish, Young Cy!" she threw back over her shoulder.

They were an odd procession—quite a company of men and horses following the slim, debonaïre figure of the girl. Once through the thickets, Young Cy placed his guard around the mill and held out his hand.

"There are no words to thank ye, Hitty!" he said steadily. "Had ye not come to my rescue, my first important assignment might have been a failure!"

"Nay," smiled Mehitable, "Mistress Lindsley could not have withstood your honest face for long. She would doubtless have been convinced! 'Twas only a question o' time!"

"Yet in that time," pointed out Young Cy triumphantly, "the British might have found and blown up the powder mill!"

"Think you there is serious danger of attack this night, then?" asked Mehitable quickly.

"As long as there is a powder mill here, and war exists, there will be danger o' enemy attack," answered Young Cy simply. "I will inform you, for your comfort, however, that it was only a very vague rumor of British approach which did reach General Washington and it be almost a certainty that nothing will come of it. And mayhap you perceived I posted two sentry around Mistress Lindsley's house, so tell Cherry not to fret."

"I will, Young Cy," promised Mehitable, and nodding again, she ran across the bridge and plunged recklessly through the thickets. It was not long, then, before she was back at Mistress Lindsley's house, before she was snuggling, once more, down beside Charity in their great feather bed. The last thing they heard as they drifted off to sleep for the second time that night was the tramp, tramp, tramp of the sentry's feet beneath their window.

CHAPTER VI

A VISIT TO HEADQUARTERS

"IT BE from John!" announced Mehitable, in a tone of quiet but profound satisfaction.

She and Charity were hanging over a note which they had spread open upon the table in Mistress Lindsley's kitchen. Charity, all excited flutterings from her cap ruffles to the ripples in her linsey-woolsey skirt, had just brought it to her sister from the door, where a messenger had placed it in her hand.

The bright sunshine streaming across the sanded floor, the cheerful snap and crackle of the fire, the home song of the teakettle—all these sounds were in utter contrast to the terror and excitement of those hours a few nights previous, when the ominous dread of intimate warfare had hovered over the house. Now it seemed as though that memory were a bad dream and only hope and happiness could exist.

"Let us tell Cousin Eliza at once!" proposed Charity. "She will be so pleased to know we are invited, Hitty! And then let us look at our party gowns!"

"Stay! Stay!" Cousin Eliza looked from one to the other in laughing dismay when, bursting into her room, the two eager voices tried to tell her at once about the note, and Mehitable and Charity fairly pranced around her bed with girlish rapture. "I can understand nothing! Nothing at all! Now, Hitty, you may tell me, since you evidently possess the note!"

"Cherry really thought o' telling you," began Mehitable honestly; but at her cousin's little frown and Charity's quick, "That be all right—you tell her, Hitty," she rushed on. "I'll read it, coz, then you can judge for yourself an we have cause for joy! Ahem!" She cleared her throat and, looking over the edge of the paper, pompously read her note in a deep, impressive voice.

"Mistress Mehitable Condit. Dear Sis:

"I take my pen in hand to ask your company and that of our sister Charity this eve at an assembly to be held at ye Arnold Tavern. I will call for you at eight o'clock. Adieu. J. Condit."

Charity clapped her hands as Mehitable ended the note, and their Cousin Eliza seemed scarcely less pleased.

"Ah, I was hoping ye would have opportunity to attend one of the assemblies!" she exclaimed in great satisfaction. "Now, what are ye to wear?"

"Our mother hath seen to that!" answered

Mehitable proudly, and forthwith told the tale of Mistress Condit's little sacrifice. Charity ran to fetch one of the dresses for her cousin's inspection who, if she had any criticism to make of the simple creation, did not express it. She did, however, insist upon their accepting certain articles of adornment from her own wardrobe—dainty slippers, fans, ribbons, and a fine lace kerchief for Mehitable. The latter immediately tried her slippers on and regarded the shining buckles that graced the toes with blissful eyes.

"John owns the only nice buckles in our family," she said frankly. "They be heirlooms which my father gave him on his eighteenth birthday. I do hope"—she wriggled her foot anxiously—"I do hope these buckles be fastened securely."

"I think the catches are good." Cousin Eliza glanced at them reassuringly. "Though I should hate to have ye lose them, Hitty, for they were my wedding buckles and possess a sentimental value not covered by money," she added.

"Oh, la, coz!" Mehitable looked at her in distress. "I fear me, then, I had better not borrow them!"

"Nay, what could happen them!" laughed Cousin Eliza. She put up her hand when Mehitable would have removed the slippers. "Ah, wear them!" she implored. "I like to think of the pretty things being worn where there is dancing

once more. I shall carry the blame an ye lose them!" And so the matter was settled.

How long that day seemed to the girls! The household tasks, which they shared as a matter of course and which had become heavier since the responsible Tabitha's departure, reading aloud by turns to the sick woman, running her errands—none of these duties seemed to make the hours pass more swiftly this day. Mehitable, thinking this and drumming nervously upon a frosty window pane about five o'clock, turned in relief at Mistress Lindsley's hurried entrance. Somehow, her manner boded a break in the monotonous hours.

"Hitty," she said, "I wonder an ye can help me out!"

"Aye," responded Mehitable cordially. "What is it?"

"Why, I clean forgot that this afternoon I was to send biscuit to headquarters! Tabbie generally bakes them and takes them to Mistress Ford's, and with her being away, the matter slipped my mind!" explained Mistress Lindsley.

"I shall be glad to take them for ye!" exclaimed Mehitable delightedly.

"That is well!" Mistress Lindsley heaved a sigh of relief as she went toward the pantry. "Though it do be growing dark," she added, stopping to glance worriedly out the window. "Such short

days, now!" she said fretfully. "And when ye are going to the assembly to-night—nay——"

"Nay, I be glad to go!" interrupted Mehitable. "I shall be glad o' the opportunity to visit the headquarters, ye mind," her honesty compelled her to add. "Mayhap I shall see His Excellency!"

"I fear not!" Mistress Lindsley hastened to disillusion her. "Ye will be expected at the *kitchen* door, Hitty!"

For a moment, Mehitable's face was a study of distaste and hurt pride; then her native sense was in evidence. "Oh, well," she said jauntily, "at least I shall see the outside o' the mansion John has told me so much about! Where be the biscuits?"

Not fifteen minutes later, she was approaching the stately home which Colonel Jacob Ford, Jr., had built about three years before, and which, now occupied by his widow and family, had been offered by Mistress Ford to General Green as headquarters and personal residence for General Washington this winter.

Mehitable, staring curiously at the ten or twelve log huts built for the guard across the lane from the Ford grounds, was about to enter the gate when a rough voice bade her halt, and she raised her startled eyes to find herself confronted by a sentry.

"Please," she said timidly, "I desire to convey this to the kitchen." She pointed to the package

of biscuit she was carrying and handed the soldier a note Mistress Lindsley had written as a pass.

The man read it, scratched a puzzled head, stared again at the note, and shook his head dubiously. "Ye had best leave the package with me, and I will take it up later, myself. They like not young females traipsing around the grounds!" he said.

Mehitable drew herself up. "Sir!" she said grandly.

"Nay," the soldier shook his head phlegmatically. She might have as well spoken to the stormy sunset in the west. "Nay—ye had best leave the package with me, and I——"

"Nay!" Mehitable shook her head.

"—I will take it up later, myself. They like not young females traipsing around the grounds!" he repeated. "I will be off duty soon," he added unexpectedly.

This, of course, would have been acceptable to Mehitable had she not desired a closer view of the Ford mansion.

"That will not do at all!" she said firmly now. She was ready to stamp her feet between vexation and impatience. "The—the biscuit"—she had a happy thought—"the biscuit are to be served at His Excellency's table for supper, and of course, ye might not get them there in time!" She smiled brilliantly. But it was all wasted, for the guard,

while a little shaken by her logic, remained fixed in his obstinate refusal to allow her entrance. He was, indeed, commencing to grind out his neat little speech, which he evidently regarded with pride, when a new voice broke into the midst of it.

"How now, sir? What be the trouble here?"

To Mehitable's surprise, for her back had been turned to the road, the sentry flushed a bright pink, while his hand flew to his forehead in a stiff salute. But her confusion was fully as great when, wheeling, she fairly bumped into a party of gentlemen who had approached unnoticed on foot. She managed to drop a curtsey, however, despite her overwhelming embarrassment and the pans of biscuit she carried, and the leader of the group, a stately, serious-faced man, who had addressed the sentry, looked down at her.

The next instant, recognition dawned in his fine eyes, for the fortunes of warfare had caused them to meet before, and his face lighted up benignly.

"Good-evening, my child!" he greeted her in his deep voice. "'Tis my little friend o' Newark Mountains, is it not?"

Mehitable swept him another curtsey, "Aye, Your Excellency, and—and—I come from Mistress Lindsley's—where I be visiting and—and—whence I am to go to—the—the rout this night—well, I come from there—Mistress Lindsley's, ye mind,

with a—with some pans o' biscuit for your supper, sir!" she stammered.

General Washington, listening to her patiently, answered her as kindly. "Come with us, then, my child. Mistress Thompson, our housekeeper, will wi'out doubt welcome this contribution to the supper. This young lady may pass," he added to the guard. "Now and in the future!"

Red of face, hating herself for having blurted out the silly little speech, poor Mehitable turned silently and stumbled along beside General Washington, his aides falling a step behind. As they proceeded up the driveway, he summoned one of the young soldiers forward, however.

"This is little Mistress Condit, Colonel Hamilton," said His Excellency. "The sister of one of our young surgeons, John Condit, ye mind."

Mehitable, acknowledging the young secretary's bow, was aware of a tall, slim figure, of a pair of handsome dark eyes and whimsical generous mouth, and instantly liked Alexander Hamilton.

"But won't Cherry die o' envy when I tell her!" she thought, laughing to herself.

There was barely time for a polite sentence or two between the young people across the broad buff and blue form of His Excellency, who listened with a kindly, absent look, before they reached the front steps of the mansion. The wide door, with its beautiful side lights, was opened by a Negro,

and Mehitable passed breathlessly into the wide hall of the headquarters.

To her country-bred eyes, vast rooms seemed to lead off in every direction. People seemed to be passing through the hall in a constant procession, and the hum of busy voices came to her ears. It was a house of business. Nothing homelike in the stately parlor to the left of her. Nothing intimate in the glimpse she had of dining room to the right of her. Life was here; but life in its most soulless, systematic, formal phase. One became aware of that at once. A quiet-eyed woman in homespun advancing to meet them was a single note of relief in the atmosphere of pressing routine.

"This be a young friend o' mine from near Newark Mountains," said General Washington, glancing kindly at the young girl. "I will turn her o'er to your care now, Mistress Thompson. And I will bid ye good-evening, my child."

Mehitable curtseyed to him and to Colonel Hamilton as they went toward the rear of the hall to a small room beneath the stairs. Then she turned bashfully to the housekeeper.

"I be Mehitable Condit, from Mistress Lindsley's. I have brought biscuit," she began.

"Ah—good!" Mistress Thompson interrupted her briskly. "Let us take them to the kitchen. I know His Excellency will enjoy them for supper."

Once inside the big kitchen, they came upon a

scene of confusion. People and yet more people—the room seemed to be filled. At least three persons were engaged before the immense fireplace, all trying not too successfully to keep out of one another's way. Mistress Ford, herself, was present, directing the preparation of a special dish for her son Timothy who, home wounded and ill, had an appetite which must be tempted. There were eighteen in General Washington's official family, or would be when Mrs. Washington, with her servants, would arrive at the end of the month—and all of Mistress Ford's family and servants, the housekeeper told Mehitable in a low voice.

"It is extremely hard for us to manage," she went on. "His Excellency hopes to be able to build a log room on this end of the house for our kitchen, in the near future, and another room of logs on the other end for his office," she added. She curtseyed to Mistress Ford, at that moment passing. "This is Captain Condit's sister, madam," she said, putting out a hand to stop the lady.

Mistress Ford paused. She was a graciously formed, sweet-faced woman, the daughter of Parson Johnes who toiled and preached and lived a life of fine example in Morris Town at that time.

"How do you do, my dear," she greeted her. "Staying with Mistress Lindsley?" she repeated in answer to her own question. "I see! Well, ye must come up sometime and see my son Timothy.

Poor lad, time hangs so heavy upon his hands! Gabriel"—she turned to a boy who, sniffing hungrily, had stuck his head in at the door—"go you home with Mistress Condit, dear. This is my second son, Gabriel," she introduced him smilingly. "Nay, it is dark, now, and not proper for a young woman to be out alone and the soldiers be about," she answered Mehitable's protest that she was not afraid to return alone.

Mehitable, smiling to herself as she thought of that adventurous trip through the woods to the powder mill with soldiers the night of the threatened British attack, now made her adieux. Escorted by the tall, awkward lad, she soon arrived at Mistress Lindsley's home. On the way, however, she learned various interesting bits of harmless gossip about life at the headquarters and much about Colonel Hamilton, to whom Gabriel seemed devotedly attached.

"But, oh, Cherry!" mourned Mehitable, when she had bade her youthful escort farewell at the door and she had tripped into the house to find Mistress Lindsley and Charity awaiting her arrival rather anxiously. "Oh, Cherry, Colonel Hamilton is betrothed! To a very lovely lady, Master Gabriel says—a Miss Elizabeth Schuyler—daughter of General Schuyler and niece o' Mistress Cochran. Doctor Cochran is surgeon general, ye mind, and is staying at the same house, Dr. Jabez

Campfield's, that John is staying at. Mayhap we will meet Mistress Schuyler—though 'tis doubtful she is here in town just now, for she lives in Albany."

Charity did not seem as cast down by news of Colonel Hamilton's engagement as might have been expected. "Didst see Young Cy?" she asked with apparent irrelevance, and when her sister shook her head, she added staidly, "Well, no doubt we'll see him this night at the rout!"

CHAPTER VII

THE ROUT AT ARNOLD'S TAVERN

AFTER their early supper came the fun of getting ready for the rout! This pleasant duty took place in Cousin Eliza's room, where, lying in bed, she gaily superintended their dressing, advising them in the art of powdering their pretty hair and the placing of sundry coquettish black patches near smiling dimples.

"Put it near her mouth, Cherry—no, no, at the corner, so!" cried the lady smilingly. "And mind ye keep the corners quirked up in your nicest smile, Hitty, to go with the patch!"

"I doubt an Mother would like these patches!" observed Mehitable soberly. "I have heard her say she likes neither powder nor patches!"

"Not at ordinary times, my child," returned her cousin rather tartly. "But this be a rare occasion! Think, ye lucky lass, ye are actually to attend a party at which His Excellency might be present, though, of course, he will not dance an he come. And I know his lady will not be there, since she hath not yet arrived in Morris Town. Yet I doubt an it will be as grand as that ball the Hessians

gave at my house in Trenton," she went on, referring to the memorable night when Washington crossed the Delaware and, surprising her "guests," took them prisoners.

"Master Gabriel told me Mistress Kitty Livingston, the daughter o' Governor Livingston, has come up from Liberty Hall in Elizabeth Town for the party, as have some o' her friends, and that she be an intimate o' Miss Schuyler's," said Mehitable, uttering a tremulous sigh of relief as Mistress Lindsley slipped the party gown over her head without disarranging her lightly powdered hair. "'Tis not as splendid as some o' your gorgeous ball gowns, Cousin Eliza," went on the girl a little wistfully, gazing at herself in the mirror as her hostess painstakingly played ladies' maid. For somehow, with the prospect of being seen in company with the Governor's daughter, her own simple little gown began to seem almost impossible!

"Nay, it is very nice, and you and Cherry, both, will look sweet and dainty, Hitty!" comforted Cousin Eliza. "Though I do wish we had my maid, Félice, here to deck ye out! She hath the French knack o' taking a bit o' ribbon and a bit o' lace and evolving a wondrous gown out o' them! Yes, I wish she were here!"

"So do I, Lizzie!" interrupted Mistress Lindsley sucking a stuck finger and gazing rather dryly at her friend lying there in bed. "I vow, since I

hath been making bread, my fingers are all thumbs!"

"Nay, ye are doing excellently well—the bodice be hard to fasten!" Mehitable assured her, concealing her impatience under a mantle of politeness. "However—mayhap Cherry could see better—the candle flickers so!" She turned to Charity who, in white shift and petticoat, stood patiently awaiting her turn to be helped into her gown.

In spite of fumbling fingers, and secret forebodings on Mehitable's part, at least, the girls were ready and waiting when John Condit and Young Cy arrived at the time stated in the note. And soon, with a girl seated upon a pillion behind each young man, they were trotting off up the lane toward Arnold's Tavern.

"Many o' the routs are held at the 'Continental House,' I am told, Cherry," chatted Young Cy as they went along. "That be the army storehouse General Washington hath built here in Morris Town. There is a vast room the length o' the building on the second floor, over the warerooms, which serves well for an assembly. But, of course, it is much nicer to have them at the Arnold Tavern, though more expensive," he added frankly.

Both girls stared in excited interest as they approached the inn. The three-cornered building, with its enormous chimney at each end and a long

porch which extended the entire breadth across the front, with guests and yet more guests constantly arriving in the flaring lights of the lanthorns hung out for welcome, seemed very imposing to their country-bred eyes. As their escorts reined in their horses, they watched with interest, too, the fine ladies stepping out of sedan chairs, other muffled forms being helped out of carts and down from pillions like their own, while many guests were approaching on foot, for carriages were very rare in those days.

Entering the wide hallway which divided the center of the house from back to front, John Condit led them up the stairs to a long room built over the kitchen and dining room in a rear extension. Adjoining this assembly room were two small rooms which, during the winter of 1777, when General Washington had had his quarters at this inn, he had used as a bedroom and office. Entering one of these rooms, now, the girls pushed their way through a crowd of chattering, silken-clad women to a mirror where they endeavored to smooth their hair and to repair the damage wintry winds had inflicted. Then, rather shyly, they met their escorts, who, sets for a minuet being formed at that moment, led them directly upon the dancing floor.

At one end of the big room were stationed the fiddlers. Around the hall, attended to by various persons who had attained admittance for the pur-

pose, were placed tallow candles. These candles kept going out, had to be snuffed, trimmed, were constantly being replaced, so that half the time the place was but dimly lighted. In spite of drawbacks like this, however, the fiddles scraped mertrily, here was a lively hum of happy voices. Scattered French phrases met the girls' ears, for there were encamped at Morris Town many charming young Frenchmen who helped to plan social events.

Groups for a quadrille followed those of the minuet. Mehitable wondered where Captain Freeman was keeping himself. It was not until the evening was well advanced that, during a lull in the music, she looked up to see him standing near her, talking to a lady. Not once, however, though he was facing her as she leaned back in her chair, fanning herself with a trembling hand, did his eyes meet hers. Instead, they were fixed upon the countenance of his partner, a young lady dressed in the height of fashion who, simpering, seemed much flattered by his attention.

"How now, Tony?" Coming up behind him at that moment and obviously thinking him there to ask Mehitable for a dance, John Condit laughingly clapped Captain Freeman upon the shoulder. "Where hast been hiding thyself? Art besieging Hitty, here, for a dance?"

"I fear my standing is not good with Mistress

Hitty," answered the other gravely, turning in a manner of studied courtesy toward them for a moment. "I dare not ask her for a dance!"

"Nay," cried John blunderingly, "ye must have one o' mine, then, Tony! I have at least three more wi' Hitty. What say ye to this minuet, which is but now forming on the floor?"

Captain Freeman, flushing a little, shook his head, however. "Nay," he returned, waving his hand negligently, "I would not deprive Mistress Hitty o' her brother's company for mine own poor one!" And bowing ironically, he was gone with his partner.

John Condit gave a low whistle. "Well, Hitty —what hast done?" he asked, giving her a curious look.

"Ye heard what he said!" Mehitable's head was held high. "It seems he does not wish to dance wi' me, forsooth!" And she faced the room with blazing cheeks, through a blur of tears, as John good-naturedly led her out for the next dance. How she walked through that minuet she never knew. Swaying, circling, curtseying—mechanically, she went through the pretty dance, praying that her wet lashes might not be noticed.

As though the gods were letting loose all their wrath, poor Mehitable had further hurts in store for her that night. John, seeking a glass of egg-nog, had left her standing momentarily beside a

group of gayly dressed young girls. They were arrayed, Mehitable was swift to notice, in the latest mode, with lavishly decked hair, with jewels and fans that bespoke wealth. Meeting their combined gaze, which seemed not too friendly, perhaps even rather gibing to one sensitive, Mehitable then looked around her uneasily for Charity; but that young person was not to be seen. The next instant a clear, critical voice came to her reddening ears.

"Kitty, Kitty—here, puss, puss, see the poor little country mouse! La, where do ye suppose she secured that gown!"

For a second, Mehitable's eyes blazed as she stared back at the rude group of girls. Then, as their scornful laughter sounded, she slowly turned away and sought a seat, her hands clenched tightly around Cousin Eliza's fan. When John found her a little later, she was fully composed, albeit a trifle pale around the mouth. But John noticed nothing amiss. He was laughing and chattering to a girl upon his arm, and when he had reached his sister, turned to her eagerly.

"Hitty, I want ye to know Mistress Kitty Livingston, Nancy's cousin, ye mind. Kitty, this be my little sister!" And he looked triumphantly from one to the other. "I wish Nancy were here!" he sighed, then—longing for the fiancée whose

abode in New York made the intervals long between the lovers' meetings.

Mehitable stood rigid for a moment, then she sank to the floor in a stately, dignified curtsey. For Mistress Livingston had been in the center of that sneering group a few moments previous. A moment after that, though, she started forward impetuously. John was murmuring an excuse, was leaving the two girls alone together—she must stop him!—but he had disappeared into the crowd. And Mehitable stood staring miserably, self-consciously ahead of her. She was aroused by a white hand upon her arm.

"My dear," said Mistress Kitty appealingly, "ye are a foolish child to pay any attention to a person like Mistress Harriet Means and her ilk! I am sure she was nothing but jealous o' your pretty face!"

Mehitable lifted amazed eyes. "Then you—you—didn't——" she choked.

"I happened to be in the group," returned Mistress Kitty quietly, her kind, generous face full of concern. "One cannot always choose one's company in a crowded place like this. Think no more of what she said! I am sure most of us standing there admired both the gown and the maid who wore it!"

What could Mehitable do, Mistress Kitty draw-

ing her gently down upon a chair beside her, but pour out the brave little story of the making of her gown! When she had finished, the other's eyes were shining.

"How proud—how very proud ye must be o' your mother!" she said softly.

"Aye, I am," commenced Mehitable, when all at once she stopped. Her companion, glancing at her in surprise, saw her staring down at her slipper with aghast eyes. "Why, it's gone!" stammered Mehitable. "It is gone!"

Mistress Kitty was full of instant concern. "Your buckle, ye mean?" she asked kindly.

"Aye," nodded Mehitable. She leaned over and searched the floor near her with desperate gaze. It was no use, however. Even as she looked, people came and went so that the cleared space of floor was constantly being shifted to another part.

"I fear ye will have to wait for the morrow, my dear!" Mistress Kitty told her at last. "Mayhap Colonel Arnold will have found it then. I see him yonder"—she rose kindly—"and will speak to him about it. Meanwhile, do not let it spoil your good time!" And, with a nod and smile, she was gone.

Poor Mehitable sat in silent, overwhelming despair, for all the other's words. She had lost Cousin Eliza's wedding buckle! That fact dulled everything. She did not even notice when Captain Freeman was led past her by the odious, trium-

phant Mistress Means, who had happened to overhear the little tilt between them, and who now took that opportunity to humiliate Mehitable. Over and over, the music seemed to whine it—she had lost Cousin Eliza's buckle!

A man's voice finally aroused her. "Pardon, mistress—you have lost a buckle from your slipper? Yes, I see, it matches that on the other!"

Coming out of her daze of misery, Mehitable held out her hand eagerly. But the buckle was not placed in her palm. Looking up in surprise, then, she stared. And stared again. Gazing back at her coolly was the young bully of the Ranfield Tavern!

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPY

MEHITABLE sprang to her feet. Her cheeks crimsoned with excitement. There was no question in her mind but that he was a British spy, for had she not seen him in the company of Hawtree, the Tory! Her bewilderment showed in her mobile face.

As she opened her mouth to speak, the young man smiled.

"I doubt an ye have the courage to do it!" he said suavely.

"Do what, sir?" asked Mehitable, staring.

"Name me spy!" he told her. He laughed at her expression.

At that moment, a pleasant voice spoke beside them. "Ah, I see ye already know each other." And the girl shifted her gaze to Colonel Hamilton's dark, smiling face.

"I was about to ask you an you had met Master Simpson, Mistress Condit. Most o' our maids are said to like the way he treads the minuet," he remarked. "Is't not so, sir?" Colonel Hamilton looked at the other teasingly, and it was the lad's

turn to flush. The young officer moved away, only looking back over his shoulder to say to Mehitable, "I was going to ask ye to come wi' me and meet my betrothed's best friend, Mistress Kitty Livingston, the daughter o' the Governor; but I must defer that pleasure until ye are less engrossed! However, mayhap ye know her also."

Half ready to weep, Mehitable looked desperately at the youth blocking her path. "I would thank ye for the buckle, sir," she said angrily, holding out her hand once more.

The other looked from her trembling, outstretched hand into her blazing eyes, and his own became steely. "I would first talk wi' ye alone," he conditioned.

But Mehitable shook her head violently. "I will hold no talk with you, sir! Give me my buckle or I will call my brother!"

Simpson looked at her scornfully. "What could he do?" he asked her.

"He could dub ye spy and—and—run ye out o' the tavern here!"

"So?" The young man's tone was amused. "Wait ye a moment, mistress!" And he was gone. It was scarcely more than a moment, however, before he was back before the girl, with Colonel Hamilton in tow.

As they reached her, Alexander Hamilton looked down into Mehitable's crimsoned face with toler-

ant, humorous eyes. "So," he chided. "'Tis a lovers' quarrel so soon. I did not know ye were that well acquainted, forsooth!" And he glanced ironically from one to the other.

Too much taken aback to do more than stammer, Mehitable turned from red to white. "N-nay, ye b-be under m-m-misapprehension, Colonel—indeed, I——" Her voice trailed away into helpless silence, and young Simpson laughed.

"She does not know me, sir," he explained in a tone which implied the opposite. "You see," he shrugged his shoulders and sprung his thunderbolt, "she dubs me spy, Colonel Hamilton!"

As Mehitable gasped at his effrontery, Hamilton spoke gravely.

"To be a spy is to follow the path of danger. He should be commended rather than criticized, mistress!" Then, as the girl stood overwhelmed and silent, he bowed.

"I hope I have helped your cause, sir," he said to Simpson, with a friendly nod. "Though, as Cupid, I fear I be both awkward and out o' practice!" And with another bow and smile, he was gone.

Simpson regarded Mehitable sarcastically. "Ye are now convinced your cry of spy could do me no harm?" he asked her.

Mehitable could only stare at him helplessly. Was it possible that she had been mistaken in thinking him a Tory? Could he have been travel-

ing with Hawtree and his companion in an official capacity of American spy at the time of the Ranfield Tavern episode? Every bit of her intelligence refused to accept this latter theory, however. The odious feel of his arm around her, his half-tipsy leer when John Condit had entered the tavern to her rescue convinced her that, despite evidence to the contrary in Colonel Hamilton's words, there was something wrong. For never would an American spy have been found under the influence of liquor while on duty!

So now Mehitable returned Simpson's crafty look with a steady one, though, as she gazed, a troubled expression crossed her brow. Whom did she know who had that set of head on shoulders, that cast of countenance? One by one she thought over her recent acquaintances in Morris Town and dismissed them. Yet the tantalizing resemblance remained.

"Well, mistress"—Simpson's voice was insolent —"an ye meet me again, ye will know me!"

"Aye, sir, I shall know ye!" returned Mehitable grimly. "Now," she held out her hand, "give me the buckle!"

Simpson hesitated. "Mistress," he said finally, sending a shifty glance to right and left of him, "I will return this buckle to ye on one condition! For reasons o' my own, I desire that my presence here this even be not known to your brother."

"Has he not seen ye?" Mehitable's question was curt.

"Nay." A twisted smile that crossed the fellow's face marred the boyish handsomeness of it. "I ha' taken pains to keep out o' his sight!"

"Why should I bargain with ye an ye be honorably in the country's service?" The girl shook her head, then glancing beyond his shoulder, she blurted it out involuntarily: "Besides, here comes John now!"

The next instant she could have bitten her tongue for, without a word, Simpson vanished. In vain did Mehitable try to keep her eyes upon him as he pushed his way to the assembly-room door. He disappeared as completely in the crowd as though the floor had swallowed him up. And with him went Cousin Eliza's buckle!

"Well, Sis—why such a sober face?" her brother greeted her jovially. "Art danced out so soon?"

As Charity and Young Cy pushed their way through the shifting groups of people, Mehitable nodded. "Aye, John, I be tired—let us away home."

John glanced at her trembling lips. "Why, so ye be, Hitty," he said kindly, then. And the others agreeing, they soon left.

How different was her journey home, thought Mehitable, weary and down-cast as she sat on the

pillion behind John. She clutched him in an agony of fatigue, weeping silently to herself as she pictured telling Cousin Eliza of the loss of her slipper buckle. What did it matter who would take the blame! The buckle was gone and Cousin Eliza must grieve!

The next afternoon, brooding over her encounter with Simpson, and planning a dozen different ways of informing her relative of her loss, Mehitable's thoughts kept swinging back in a circle to the puzzling question, why should Simpson have desired his presence among the Continentals to be kept from John Condit the night before? What could be the reason save that the young officer, confronted by Simpson, would tell of that other encounter in Orange, and having his word accepted more freely by the Americans than a young girl's could be, that doubt would then fall more swiftly and more surely upon the spy, *if he were playing double!*

At last, Mehitable caught up her cape and ran upstairs. Entering her cousin's room, she found Charity entertaining the older women with a vivacious account of last evening's festivities. They all stared at Mehitable, attired for outdoors, and Charity broke off her narrative to ask where she was going.

"I don't mind the weather!" said Mehitable, in answer. "My head aches—I am going for a walk!"

"Very well," agreed Mistress Lindsley. "But go not far!"

"Do ye wish me to go wi' you, Hitty?" asked Charity, in a low voice, following the other to the door. But Mehitable shook her head and ran downstairs.

Once out on the hard, frozen road, she bent her steps straight toward headquarters, and passing the sentry at the gate, who, recognizing her with a grin, saluted her, she soon found herself admitted to the Ford mansion and conducted by the Negro doorman to the back room used by General Washington as his office. There she found Colonel Hamilton alone, working at a table upon some reports. He rose courteously.

"His Excellency be out, Mistress Condit," he told her. "Is there aught I can do for you?"

"I came not to see His Excellency, but you, sir," Mehitable answered. She stood twisting her hands, her heavy cape hood shadowing a face that looked rather young and pinched and pathetic at that moment. At her host's invitation, she seated herself abruptly and raised her eyes to find the officer studying her with a surprised look. As her glance met his, he withdrew his politely, and there was an awkward little silence. Then the young man swung around and regarded her with frank goodnature.

"An there be anything I can do, as I said," he

began smilingly, and at the kindliness in his tone the girl took courage.

"Colonel Hamilton, why did ye accept Master Simpson's word, last night, that we were betrothed?" she asked him steadily. The other's face sobered.

"Perhaps because of my acquaintance wi' the young man's family," he answered in grave surprise. "Are ye not, Mistress Condit?"

"Nay." Mehitable shook her head. "I never saw the young man before but once, sir. That was in Orange at an inn run by a Tory hostess, and he was then in the company of two Tories, both of whom I know to be dangerous enemies."

Colonel Hamilton nodded. "An that be true, mistress, what of it?" he asked. "Mayhap he was but pursuing his duty!"

"Think you, sir, an he was, he would be drunk?" she asked in return.

"Drunk!" Colonel Hamilton started. "Drunk, ye say, mistress?"

"Aye, as I can prove by my brother, Captain Condit, sir." Mehitable's voice carried conviction, and His Excellency's secretary looked troubled.

"Not only that, sir—why should he lie to you in saying we were betrothed, and why should he want to bribe me to not mention his presence at the rout to my brother?" Mehitable struck her hands

sharply together. "Colonel Hamilton, I dub him spy!" she cried. "He be naught but a British spy!"

As the girl's bold words dwindled into silence, Colonel Hamilton got to his feet and began a troubled pacing up and down the room. Mehitable watched him in silence until he turned to her in sudden decision.

"Mistress Condit," he said, "let us test him. I have a plan!"

And now, his clever mind forming a snap judgment and working out the details in rapid sequence, the young officer approached the table where, seating himself, he took up his quill pen. For half an hour, perhaps, the silence was broken only by the scratching of his pen upon paper, then sanding what he had written, he held out what appeared to be a lengthy and detailed report to Mehitable.

"I have here written, Mistress Condit," Hamilton said, tapping the paper with a long finger, "what purports to be a report. It is an apparent statement of our army's numbers and munitions of war. In reality, I have exaggerated both figures to four times the number. And now, this be my plan." He looked around him cautiously and then bent toward her. "I am to meet Simpson in half an hour's time at Quartermaster General Greene's office. I shall, upon his arrival, have to leave the room and will 'carelessly' leave these papers visible

upon my desk. An Master Simpson think them worth carrying to the enemy, well and good! They will think twice, receiving these numbers, about attacking us! An he does not touch the papers," Colonel Hamilton bowed, "we will have retained our helper and ye will have been proven to be mistaken!" He looked for his army cape and hat. "And now, let us away!"

"Ye mean," Mehitable faltered, "ye mean ye will let me see the—the—fun, too, sir!"

"Aye!" Having found his garments upon a chair, Colonel Hamilton fastened the clasp of his cape and smiled down at her. "Surely you have earned the right! A horse for the lady, boy!" He spoke to the Negro whom he had summoned.

It did not take them long to canter to the village center, where was located the Quartermaster's office in a small building. The place, save for a sentry, was deserted, and Colonel Hamilton, ordering the man to conceal their horses behind the structure, led Mehitable directly to a room adjoining that used by General Greene as his office.

"An I leave the door ajar between, you will be able both to see and to hear what takes place in the office. There will be no danger, for it be growing dusk outside, and Simpson will not discover you!" he told her gleefully. As a matter of fact, he might have been a schoolboy, planning a trick

upon another boy, so much did he seem to be enjoying the incident.

He had no sooner reëntered the office, after adjusting the door and seating himself at a table there, pretending to be immersed in work, than there was a knock upon the outer door and Simpson entered.

"Good-even to ye, my lad," said Hamilton, writing so busily that he did not look up.

"Good-even, sir." Simpson stood at ease for awhile. Mehitable, watching him through the door crack, saw his restless eyes darting here and there. Once his gaze seemed to meet hers and she started; but he immediately looked away, and she knew that she had not been detected.

Suddenly a chair scraped, and Colonel Hamilton rose from the table. "Just a moment, Simpson," he said hurriedly. "Sorry to keep you waiting, but this report must be sent out. Wait you here. I shall return shortly!" And passing into the room where Mehitable was secreted, he apparently pulled the door shut behind him. Tiptoeing over to the girl, he applied his eye to the crack also.

For a short space of time, Simpson fiddled idly about the room. He walked to the window and glanced out, perhaps to reassure himself as to a safe escape, perhaps in case Colonel Hamilton should return too suddenly. But turning all at once, he then made straight for the table and

caught up the false report. Convinced upon a hasty perusal that here was the most valuable paper written so far, during the war, he folded it, and as Colonel Hamilton and Mehitable watched, he concealed it like a flash in his pocket. He lost no time in departure, then. Crossing the room with a single bound, catlike in its grace, the outer door opened and closed behind him, and his footsteps could be heard dying rapidly away in the distance.

Colonel Hamilton and Mehitable stared at each other. Simultaneously, they broke into laughter.

"I vow," cried Hamilton, waving his hand helplessly in the direction taken by Simpson, "despite my loss, I do protest it be the best joke ever played upon the British!"

"Nay," cried Mehitable, rocking with mirth, her voice going up to a funny squeak of hysteria, "the joke be upon me, sir! He still has my slip-slip-slipper buckle!"

And then, though she had wept half the night over this fact, she laughed and laughed.

CHAPTER IX

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN"

AND I do protest it be a shame, forsooth!" said Tabitha vigorously, facing the little group gathered in Mistress Lindsley's kitchen on the twenty-third of December.

"But, Tabbie—an he be guilty!" ventured Mehitable thoughtfully, after a pause during which the fire, snapping and cracking, seemed to echo the other girl's unusual tones.

"He is not guilty! I have good information that there are those who are persecuting him!" asserted Tabitha, with a spirit which amazed her listeners. In fact, they were not used to the quiet, work-driven Tabitha voicing any opinion whatsoever, and now to have her defend such a man as Benedict Arnold quite unexpectedly was surprising, to say the least. Yet, newly arrived from her aunt's house, Tabitha was but reflecting the interest this strange man's court-martial was arousing in officers' quarters and soldier huts on Basking Ridge alike. And she, like the majority, believed the heretofore brave general to be innocent of the charges preferred against him. Again and again

had he proved his courage and loyalty, for Arnold had been the first among the colonists to espouse the cause of freedom. He had assisted Colonel Ethan Allen in that splendid capture of Ticonderoga and Crown Point. He had been wounded at the unsuccessful siege and assault at Quebec, and wounded again at Saratoga. He had shared hardships and dangers with General Sullivan, making war upon the retreating British troops under General Tryon from Danbury, Connecticut.

"How could such a man be guilty!" demanded Tabitha, continuing. "Why, they charge him, while in command o' Philadelphia, with permitting a Tory vessel to enter the port without acquainting either General Washington or the state officials of it so doing. They accuse him of tyranically closing the shops and preventing purchases by the town's inhabitants; but making personal purchases—oh, it be outrageous! They even accuse him o' transporting the private property o' Tories in wagons belonging to the state—he, who fought the enemy at Quebec and was wounded!"

"But, Tabbie!" exclaimed Mehitable, staring curiously, as were the others, at her, "why concern yourself with all this? And how know ye these charges?"

"My cousin be clerk o' the court which is to try General Arnold," said Tabitha. "He was discussing the matter wi' my aunt last night, and I over-

heard them. And I saw General Arnold this morning, crippled, maimed in the defense o' his country so that he must walk wi' a cane—one leg be shorter than t'other—and yet accused by that country o' such scurvy deeds! It be an outrage on American justice, say I!" And the girl stood with clenched hands, staring into space.

Mehitable, watching her, tried to discover within herself a reason for Tabitha's unusual agitation and confessed to herself that there seemed none except an exaggerated sense of justice possessed by the other. But, a little later, the reason was made apparent by Tabitha, herself.

"Let us talk o' more pleasurable things," said the Morris Town girl, turning smilingly to Mehitable. "I heard you went to a rout, Hitty."

"Aye, Cherry and I. But how did you know?" asked Mehitable in surprise.

"My cousin—that same one who is clerk o' the court—was present. Did you have a good time?" answered Tabitha, ending with a question.

"A—fairly—good time," hesitated Mehitable. "But, oh, Tabbie—hear what happened!" And she plunged into the story of Cousin Eliza's slipper buckle and the story of trapping the spy.

It was not until she had come to the end of the tale that she glanced at the other girl. Charity and Mistress Lindsley were chuckling, but Tabitha stood straight and tall, deathly pale, with her eyes

staring, horror-stricken, at Mehitable, and her hands pressed against her heart as though to relieve an unbearable hurt.

"Why—why—Tabbie—what be the matter?" Mehitable sprang to her feet, upsetting the pan of apples she was peeling.

"You say he—he—stole the paper and escaped with it?" Tabitha seemed hardly able to enunciate the words.

"Aye. He proved himself unquestionably a British spy, as I claimed he was." Mehitable went over to the other and put her arms across the thin shoulders, while the others watched with wide eyes. "But why do you care, Tabbie? What be it to you what this Simpson did?"

With a bitter gesture, Tabitha covered her now burning face with her hands. "He—he is my brother!" Her voice was muffled. "My name be Simpson, too!"

Too surprised to speak for a moment, Mehitable stood silent until Mistress Lindsley, laying down her knitting, hurried to Tabitha's side.

"It be true," she said, patting the sobbing girl upon the arm, nodding to Mehitable over the other's bowed head. "Tabbie, when an orphaned baby, was placed in the care o' this aunt in Morris Town, and for convenience' sake, took her name. Her brother kept the name o' Simpson—you did not mention him by name, Hitty dear, or I should

have known him at once—though he was placed in the care of another aunt in New York Town. The New York aunt was wealthy and a Tory. Tabbie and I had been hoping against hope that her brother would remain true to his own country; but it seems he has not—mayhap, because too imbued with his aunt's viewpoint!"

"Then it be not his fault an he is a Tory!" retorted Mehitable generously.

But Tabitha shook her head. "He hath reached the age o' wisdom. He is no babe, despite his youthful face. He t-told me, though, he was a patriot." She sighed. "I must have known he was not—I have had my suspicions. And now I be convinced he is an enemy. Oh, the wretches who will not help their own in time o' need! But what chance, think you"—she fixed burning eyes upon the other's face—"hath a person like my brother when stern justice would try such a man as General Arnold! I shudder to think what may be his end!" And with another gesture of despair, poor Tabitha escaped from the room.

She had no sooner gone than a cheerful knock sounded upon the door and John Condit entered.

"Hitty," he said, greetings over, "how would ye like to go home to Orange for the day?"

"Alone with you—without Cherry, I mean?" answered Mehitable, longing to accept, yet not wishing to be selfish.

Both Charity and John at once reassured her, John declaring that the little sister was not strong enough to travel express as they must, and Charity explaining contentedly that Young Cy was to take her over the army encampment that afternoon, anyway. So Mehitable ran joyfully upstairs to acquaint Cousin Eliza with the news of her day's trip. She stumbled upon Tabitha, a forlorn heap, weeping desolately in a dark corner under the eaves.

"Poor Tabbie, do not weep!" Mehitable bent over her pityingly.

"Yet would you weep an it were your brother!" sobbed Tabitha.

Baffled, Mehitable turned slowly away, confronted by the old, old mystery of each one having to live his own life. Why should she, Mehitable, be about to start happily off upon an unexpected trip with a brave, fine, strong brother, while poor overworked Tabitha, whose life was drab at its best, was left at home to mourn a delinquent one!

It was not until they were well upon their way that the depression left by Tabitha's misfortune disappeared. But bright sunshine, fresh air, and rapid motion at last dispelled it, and Mehitable could once more be her sunny self. Their trip back to the Orange Mountain farm was an uneventful one. Mistress Condit was duly and happily surprised by her daughter's unexpected appearance and would have detained her son, also.

But he, saying that he would be back in mid-afternoon and that his sister must be ready, then, for the long trip in return to Morris Town, rode on to Newark. The Masonic brethren, greatly elated by the presence of their most famous lodge member, General Washington, were planning to celebrate the festival of St. John at Morris Town. Not having the necessary paraphernalia, John Condit was sent in advance of Captain Thomas Kinney and Major Jeremiah Bruen to Newark to see if the Morris Town chapter could borrow the required articles from the former chapter. He returned, elated, at the time set, saying he had been successful in his business.

It was hard for the father and mother to bid farewell to their children when John started for the kitchen door. Traveling, in those days, was fraught with perils. The New Jersey Indians, wisely treated by the first settlers, had always been more or less friendly, it is true; but dangers of war, of nature, and even from wild animals were always at hand during these dark years of the Revolution.

"I stopped to assure Master Jones and his wife o' Young Cy's safety," said John incidentally, helping his sister to mount to her saddle.

"That be right," commended his mother. "I am glad ye stopped at the Jones's farmhouse. Good-bye, my son!" she added, as he turned back

and caught her in his arms, then wrung his father's hand. "May Heaven keep ye and Hitty safe!"

"We shall return the first week o' January, I feel sure!" called back Mehitable, as they trotted away. "Cousin Eliza be planning to return to Trenton that day!"

So they were off! Up over the Mountain they went, one horse following the other on the narrow trail, for they were to return to Morris Town through Hanover and Whippanong. It was dusk when they reached the latter village. Mehitable, peering through the shadows, uttered an interested exclamation.

"Look, John, what be that?" She pointed up the road where an odd-looking vehicle was slowly approaching them.

"Nay, I cannot tell!" answered her brother, staring.

"Is it not an oxcart?" remarked Mehitable. Then, as they neared the outfit, which had now stopped before a house, whence two women had flown out to greet the cart's occupants, she added, "Why, it be Mistress Rhoda Farrand and her son Dan, whom we met at Mistress Lindsley's one morning! Such a queer, fiery old lady, John! What can she be doing? She hath an armchair in the back o' the cart and she be knitting furiously, as though she were sitting before her own kitchen fire. Now, she hath laid down her knitting and

taken up a paper. She be reading something to those two ladies standing in the road!"

Mistress Farrand looked up, as the brother and sister drew abreast her oxcart, and nodded in a neighborly fashion.

"This be a letter from my son at Morris Town," she said briskly, seeing Mehitable's curious gaze upon it. "It is getting so dark, I scarce can see to read it; but having read it to every farmer's wife all the way from my home, I almost can recite it." And while the two ladies and Dan Farrand kept a respectful silence, the old lady acquainted the others with its contents.

It was a pitiful letter from Lieutenant Farrand, written from the camp at Morris Town, telling of the destitution among the soldiers of his own company who, at home, were the sons of neighbors. The young man ended by imploring Mistress Farrand to "tell their mothers."

"So I made my daughters Hannah and Betsy fetch me my cloak and then set stockings upon their needles and Dan and I started out with our steers, rousing the countryside like Paul Revere. Only we be rousing the mothers and sisters, instead of the Minute Men," ended Mistress Farrand with a jolly laugh, yet with a tear in her eye as she spoke a moment later of how the men, looking back, could trace their tracks to the army camp by their bloody footprints and how, at roll call, they had to take

off their caps and stand on them to keep their feet from freezing.

"This be Prudence and Mary Ball." The old lady introduced the two ladies suddenly.

"Our three brothers are in Lieutenant Farrand's company," cried Mistress Prudence, looking over at Mehitable with wet eyes. "Why—we—we did not dream they were so needy!" she stammered. "We shall not sleep this night before we have finished those stockings!"

"So every mother and sister hath said!" Mistress Farrand nodded encouragingly. "I knew they would respond thus! Drive on, Dan—we still ha' many places to visit! Ye must pardon my not getting out o' the cart, for it doth save my time!" she called back, as Dan chirped to his oxen, and the funny contraption moved ponderously away.

"Aye!" the ladies called back, waving cordially. "And now to work, Prue," added Mistress Mary as, nodding hastily to the two on horseback, they turned and hurried into the house.

"I'll warrant stockings will pour down Jockey Hollow Road to our army camp in a steady stream on the morrow!" observed John Condit laughingly yet in moved tones. "Think you an appeal to *mothers* could fail!"

Mehitable nodded silently, for, somehow, there was a great lump in her throat, as she thought of

the candles which would flicker that night on the brave, worn faces of the Continental mothers as, hour after hour, from dark to dawn, they would sit up to knit the socks for the cold, bruised feet which once, tiny and pink and cunning, they had held in their hands to kiss.

"What an uneventful trip this has been!" remarked the girl presently, as they went jogging along the road where, leaving Whippanong village, it curved to begin an ascent between wild, lonely hills.

"Art disappointed?" commenced John, laughing, then he paused and his sister, glancing at him questioningly, saw him draw his reins all at once to greet a silent figure which had appeared beside the road as though by magic, out of nowhere.

"Gray Hawk!" exclaimed Mehitable breathlessly.

The Indian turned to her with hand up, palm outward, in stately welcome; but his glance flew back to John's face and, pointing to the road which led forward, he shook his head.

"Danger!" he grunted.

John nodded. Without knowing in what the danger consisted, he accepted the red man's statement without question. Then, as all three remained silent, they heard, far off, thundering toward them, the sound of a horse's hoofs!

It was now quite dark. Snow was threatening

again, with the advance of night, the bright sunshine having been dimmed by gathering clouds even before they left home. Mehitable, sitting motionless in her saddle, suddenly shivered at the penetrating dampness and perhaps because of the wild loneliness of the hills and the blackness of the night and the mystery of those ever-nearing hoof-beats.

"Art cold, Hitty!" asked John concernedly, noticing her shiver. "Yet we had best remain here for the nonce. We will ride hard, later, to get your blood warm, but now those hoof-beats portend evil. Is it not so, Gray Hawk?" He glanced at the Indian, who nodded in the darkness.

"It is so, my brother," returned Gray Hawk in his own language.

"Aye, I do not mind——" Mehitable broke off with a gasp. For, as they waited beside the road, where they had withdrawn, a horse flashed out of the night, passed them like a flying thing, and disappeared into the darkness beyond. Gray Hawk galloped after it, and before the others realized he was gone, he returned, leading his trophy.

Mehitable peered uneasily at the captured runaway beast. "Why, John, what be on this horse's back?" she asked in a shocked voice.

John Condit hastily dismounted and approached the horse, which the Indian was quieting. "'Tis Sturgins!" John told her presently. His voice

was strained and hoarse. "Some Tory fiends hath tied him head downward on his horse and sent him off, thus!"

Mehitable uttered an exclamation of pity as Doctor Condit, whipping out his knife, cut the cruel knots of hemp around Sturgins and lifted his limp figure to the ground. Gray Hawk led the body-servant's horse to a near by sapling in the little glen in which they were hidden, and there secured the beast.

"Can ye stay here, Sis, while I ride back a short ways to the river and get poor Sturgins some water?" asked John Condit, rising after a short examination of the unconscious man.

Mehitable shrank back instinctively. "Can ye not use snow, John?" she asked quickly.

Her brother shook his head. "He cannot drink snow, Hitty," he said quietly. He stood waiting for a moment; but only a moment. The next instant Mehitable had squared her shoulders.

"I'll stay, John," she told him bravely. "Only—" her voice broke a little—"only hurry, won't ye?"

"Aye." Nodding his head at her approvingly, John hurriedly mounted his horse and headed him back for the river. "Gray Hawk will watch o'er ye!"

But Mehitable, glancing at the Indian's aloof, silent figure beside the road, thought wistfully

that he was not much company. She slipped from her horse and went over to kneel beside the injured man. Pityingly she unfastened his coat collar and loosened it. Whether it was the icy touch of her fingers or because he was at that moment recovering consciousness, Sturgins uttered a groan and spoke.

"Captain!"

Mehitable bent over him. "He be gone for water to help revive ye, Sturgins," she told him.

"Captain!" Unheedingly, Sturgins repeated it. Suddenly, gasping, staring, he half raised himself from the snowy ground. "The Tories—the Tories——" he panted wildly.

Mehitable tried to soothe him. "Captain Condit will return i' a moment, Sturgins. Nay, rest ye easy!"

"The Tories—I overheard—Kemble——" Sturgins fell to muttering deliriously.

Mehitable, listening impatiently for her brother's return, paid not much attention until a random name caught her ear.

"Hawtree!" She bent over the servant again. "Said ye Hawtree, Sturgins?"

"Aye, mistress!" For the first time Sturgins looked at her rationally, with clearing gaze. It was dark, so that they could scarcely see each other's faces; but as they looked, the moon eluded the baffling snow clouds and, like a curious specta-

tor, remained to stare down at the scene. And now, kneeling there, Mehitable caught a new tone to Sturgins's voice and was convinced that he no longer wandered in his mind. "Hawtree caught me—I got wind o' their meetin' in Kemble's barn —Mr. Richard Kemble did take the oath; but he and his old father both be Tories at heart, oath or no oath—'twas done jes' to save their property from confiscation. Hawtree and Jaffray caught me——"

Mehitable's heart had given a leap of terror. "Jaffray, too?" she faltered. "Art sure? Then I did see Hawtree t'other day! Oh, how dared they come to the very army camp!"

"Spies do be everywhere, mistress!" Sturgins, strengthened by excitement, sat up. "And ye can see," he made an eloquent gesture, "the result o' their catchin' me—the captain will ha' some bother fixin' me up this time, though I ain't afeared but what he kin do it! Nay, mistress, I be not afeared o' that." He faltered. "Jaffray," he went on in a weaker tone, "Jaffray lashed me—allus he hated me, e'en when I worked for him on the river—then —then he tied me upon my horse as ye found me. He gave it a kick, too, the varlet—hurtin' my beast thus! And he said—'Go,' he said, 'tell your master worse awaits him for his insolence at Ranfield's!'"

Mehitable caught her breath and glanced nervously around the moonlit glen. Yonder waited the Indian, cold, aloof, impassive. What could be delaying her brother? she asked herself. Why did he not return? The Whippanong River was only a short ways back. Surely John had not been intercepted upon that short stretch of road. Then, as she listened, the sound of hoof-beats came to her ears, and she turned in acute relief to Sturgins.

"There be the Captain!" she said, brightening. But Sturgins fell back upon the ground with a bitter groan, and, glancing at Gray Hawk, Mehitable was alarmed to see him crouched forward in an attitude of tense listenings.

"It be more than *one* horse! Can't ye hear? Gad, an it be the Tories again!" All at once, to Mehitable's fright, he turned over and pounded the snow with convulsive hand. "We be lost! Hawtree and Jaffray—they threatened to follow me—I was not going to scare ye by telling ye so—but now what matters it? 'Tis them—'tis them!"

"Ah, *no*, Sturgins!" Mehitable half sobbed it. But before she could say more, before she could move, horsemen galloped past on the road, coming from the direction of Morris Town.

Now, all would have gone well, in spite of the moonlight, for Gray Hawk, like a flash, had withdrawn behind a tree, where he and his horse melted

imperceptibly into the background and the others were close to the ground; but Mehitable's horse neighed. Instantly, as though they had been listening with sharpened ears as they galloped, the horsemen wheeled and returned to the glen.

The girl, springing to her feet, stood in frozen horror as the newcomers threw themselves from their steeds. It was Hawtree who seized her! It was Jaffray who kicked the prone figure of Sturgins, moaning in fright upon the ground! But the next moment Mehitable gave a bitter cry, for John galloped unsuspectingly into the glen!

Everything seemed to happen at once, then. There was a blow. Was it upon Mehitable's head? Sinking into oblivion, the girl thought dully it must have been delivered by Hawtree's cowardly fist. The wild voice of Sturgins came to her dimly through vast distance, as he struggled to his feet, dodging Jaffray, and ran weakly toward his master. John had leaped from his horse, and now, with drawn pistol, stood crouched behind the beast.

Mehitable, her senses swimming, felt the earth rock.

"Captain, run—run, sir! I'll fight them! Only run, sir!" It was Sturgins's voice again.

A flash came from Jaffray's gun, there was the whir of a tomahawk, there was another flash from John's pistol and poor Sturgins, between the three,

threw up his hands, spun a quarter of the way around, and fell upon his face. All this Mehitable saw darkly, as though through a smoked glass, before smothering blackness swooped upon her and she knew no more!

CHAPTER X

THE FINE LADY

IT WAS a long time before Mehitable opened her eyes. When she did so, she found her head pillowed upon someone's knee and John Condit kneeling upon the ground near by, beside a silent figure.

"Greater love hath no man——" John was saying, with a little catch in his breath. "Ah, Tony!" he cried pitifully.

Someone spoke above Mehitable's head. "'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' Poor Sturgins! He did indeed love ye well, John!" There was a tremor in the deep voice and Mehitable, lying languidly, felt her hair stirred by a sigh. With that, she tried to lift her head.

At once there was a tenseness in the arms that held her. A short pause ensued. Then Anthony Freeman spoke a trifle breathlessly.

"Your—your sister be recovering from her swoon, I think, John."

Doctor Condit hastily placed his white kerchief over the still face of the man on the ground, glanced

at another figure lying equally motionless on the snow near by, and, rising, came toward Mehitable.

"Well, Sis?" He tried to say it lightly, as he dropped upon one knee beside her; but the awfulness of those moments a short time ago rushed upon them both, and with a little sob, Mehitable sat up and put her arms around his neck. Patting and soothing her, John hugged her to him with brotherly warmth. "At least," he whispered after awhile, during which Captain Freeman, relieved of his burden, got up and moved courteously out of hearing, "at least you and I and Gray Hawk be whole and sound. The rogues got only," he threw back his head to wink the tears out of his eyes, his voice growing thick, "got only old Sturgins!"

Mehitable pushed back the dark hair from her forehead with a weak gesture. "But—would ye mind—I—I can't seem to remember! Why be Captain Freeman here? Whence did he come? And where be Gray Hawk?"

"The Tories arrived but a moment before I returned. Gray Hawk slipped away in a desperate effort to head me off from the glen; but I had cut back through the woods from the river—I lost my way for the nonce, too—and he missed me! When he returned, Tony—who was en route to Whippanong—was here, having heard the fracas from the road. Tony fought like twelve men, as did Gray Hawk, then—but 'twas Tony who had

Jaffray squealing like a pig from his marvelous sword strokes"—here John laughed in sheer revulsion of feeling—"and who caught ye away from Hawtree, whom I thought to see come to his end then and there, handicapped though Tony was by holding ye and fighting wi' one hand! By the time I had dealt the other Tories a blow or two—that fellow we saw at Ranfield's Tavern was one o' them, by the way—the villains fled, leaving Jaffray a victim to Gray Hawk's tomahawk." Mehitable repressed a shudder. "Ho, Tony—where are ye? Gray Hawk fled after the Tories, Hitty! Ho, Tony—come hither and be thanked by two eternally grateful folk for your sword's prowess!"

Mehitable struggled to her feet. She felt dizzy and sick. Even to her own ears, her voice, when she spoke, sounded curt and cold; but she could not control its tone, so vague and unreal did she still feel after the turmoil of the fight.

"Captain Freeman, I be in your debt, 'twould seem."

The eager figure advancing to meet her stopped with an abruptness that might have shown the girl, had she been less dazed, how ungrateful she appeared. Then Anthony Freeman bowed formally.

" 'Tis I who am in your debt, mistress, for the opportunity to use my idle sword! Ram's Horn, John," he turned with a laugh toward Doctor Con-

dit, "'twas really a most glorious fight and I ha' ye to thank for giving me a chance to exert myself! 'Twas a relief"—his voice was whimsical—"to get at the enemy after being cooped up i' camp for a month or two! It be far easier to fight than to wait!"

Mehitable, upon her brother's arm, went slowly toward her horse. "Now ye ha' got the woman's viewpoint o' the war, sir," she said, meaning to be humorous; but sounding only ironical to the young man's sensitive ears.

"Can ye ride, think ye, Hitty?" asked John Condit in an anxious undertone, after he had hoisted her into her saddle, noticing her unsteadiness there.

"Aye!" nodded Mehitable. Her hands were moist from the effort of holding herself erect upon her horse; but her voice was indomitable.

Captain Freeman, mounting to his own saddle, swore softly at the pathos of the little slender figure drooping upon her steed near him.

"I would suggest," he spoke savagely, wondering at his friend's stupidity, "that ye hold your sister before ye upon your horse and I will lead hers, John! Ye poor fool!" he added softly to himself, with an angry glance at his unconscious friend.

"O' course!" Instantly remorseful, John Condit rode close to Mehitable and plucked her from her saddle. "Now, why did I not think o' that!"

"Ye would have, had it been *Nancy!*" Unwittingly, Captain Freeman placed resentful stress upon his cousin's name, who was John's betrothed.

There was a little silence as the four horses went clop-clopping down the curving, hilly road, for, besides Mehitable's, Captain Freeman was leading Sturgins's mount as well. Then the girl felt her brother shake with mirth. When she demanded the reason, he shook his head at first.

"Nay, tell me why ye laugh!" persisted the girl.

"I—I—was but wondering why it was *Tony*, here, who thought o' your riding wi' someone!" said John meekly. And burst into renewed laughter when Mehitable's back stiffened into a haughty ramrod.

But it was not the night for mirth. Presently John fell silent, brooding upon the humble, faithful friend he had left behind him in the glen, beneath the stark, naked trees.

"To-morrow," he said to Captain Freeman, "to-morrow must we return wi' pick and shovels, Tony!"

"Aye—an the wolves don't go earlier!" Anthony's voice was dispirited, and they finished their journey in gloomy speechlessness, Mehitable lying spent against her brother's shoulder in a daze of misery.

Doctor Condit prescribed a day in bed for his sister when, to Charity's fright, and Mistress Lind-

sley's concern, he carried Mehitable into Mistress Lindsley's kitchen a little later. He told them hastily what had happened, then hurried out to rejoin his friend and the restive horses.

The next morning, Mehitable, however, insisted upon rising, declaring that, save for a little stiffness, she felt perfectly well.

"Just think, Cherry, on the morrow 'tis Christmas!" she mused that afternoon.

"It does no good to think on't!" sighed Charity.

"How feels your head where that wicked man did strike ye?" asked Tabitha, looking up from her knitting. "Someone at the door, Cherry!" she added.

"My head does not hurt, now!" answered Mehitable. "John said he struck me not upon my temple, but where my hair broke the blow. And that I swooned more from fright than hurt. Who was it, Cherry?" She looked expectantly, as did Tabitha, at her sister, as the latter closed the door and came back to the fireside.

"It was someone asking to be directed to the army encampment," answered Charity, laughing. "That be the tenth person—I vow 'tis so! I've been called and called to the door and always 'tis the same question, 'Where be the army encampment? Which way lies Basking Ridge?'"

Mehitable looked at her in smiling speculation. "I do believe that this be the result o' Mistress

Farrand's letter-reading! These be 'letter stockings' from all the mothers who heard her read yesterday!" she exclaimed.

"What do ye mean?" demanded the other two. And how they laughed and applauded when Mehitable told them of having met the spirited old lady riding and knitting in her oxcart, going forth to arouse the feminine countryside to action.

Christmas Day passed quietly, with not even an extra candle lighted to add festivity, and because of the food scarcity, which was becoming more noticeable, not even an extra goody to grace the table.

It was the morning of December twenty-eighth that Tabitha, who had been out in the storm which had descended finally upon Morris Town after days of threatening, came into the kitchen. She looked spent and weary and for a little time, while she was removing her wet cloak and stamping the snow from her feet, she said little. At last, in answer to a question from Mehitable who, spinning beside the fire, had been regarding her curiously above the whirring wheel, Tabitha said that she had been to the headquarters for Mistress Lindsley.

"And, oh, Hitty"—she faced the other in sudden agitation—"there do be doubts o' General Arnold's acquittal now! My cousin told me, though, of course, in private, for public belief in his exonera-

tion is favorable, that he is afraid the general is going to be sorely disappointed!"

"When will General Arnold know the result o' his trial?" inquired Mehitable.

"Not for weeks, mayhap!" Tabitha shook her head sadly. "I fear 'twill turn him into a bitter man, one ready for disloyalty, e'en," she added.

"Oh, no!—how could a patriot as fine as General Arnold e'er turn traitor to his country!" cried Mehitable, shocked.

But Tabitha continued shaking her head. "An he thinks his compatriots deemed him unworthy, remembering not what he had done for his country, remembering not the wounds he had undergone for the sake o' that country, listening only to words against him, no telling what might happen, Hitty!" she said sagely, unconscious that she was forecasting General Arnold's terrible act which later was to shock everyone.

Mehitable stopped her spinning wheel, and, rising, came over to the other girl. "Tabbie," she said quietly, "art still comparing General Arnold's fate with the possible one o' your brother?"

Tabitha stood stock still, twisting and untwisting her hands and refusing to meet Mehitable's kindly, searching gaze.

"Aye." Facing away from her obstinately, Tabitha nodded at last.

"But why, my dear?" Mehitable gently drew her around. "Do ye know, Tabbie, I vow part o' your trouble is anticipating it! Always ye do look on the dark side o' things. Ye said that ye had suspicioned your brother being a Tory, despite his telling you he was patriot. Well, mayhap events would have happened as they did, yet would ye have been spared days, weeks o' suffering, had ye not brooded over it. Ye not only meet trouble halfway, but ye take a stagecoach to get ye there quicker!"

"A stagecoach?" Poor Tabitha looked at Mehitable without humor.

"In your mind, child," responded Mehitable, laughing and impatient. "A make-believe stagecoach!"

"But, Hitty, I can't help being that way," said Tabitha gently.

Mehitable looked at her for a long moment and finally sighed. "I fear ye be right," she returned. "But I do feel sorry for ye, Tabbie!"

About three o'clock that afternoon, Mehitable and Charity, restless from confinement, started out through the blizzard. They had seized upon the slight excuse of borrowing some thread for Mistress Lindsley from her friend, the housekeeper at headquarters.

"And mayhap we could see the son o' Mistress Ford's—Timothy, who be home wounded," sug-

gested Mehitable, trudging along with her head bent before the whirlwind of snow that drifted up the lane toward them.

"Aye." Charity's voice was doubtful. Presently she added, "But I like not visiting strange young men, Hitty!"

"Oh, Cherry, when he be ill and wounded!" exclaimed the more sociable Mehitable. "Fie, suppose it were Young Cy!" And she turned to look over her shoulder at the other.

Charity, plodding behind her sister with downbent head, did not see the mischief lurking in Mehitable's dark eyes, and she answered her remorsefully, her tender heart instantly touched.

"You are right, Hitty! I do feel ashamed!"

They were admitted to the Ford residence by the Negro doorman, and asking for Mistress Thompson were directed to a little rear room back of the dining room. There they found the lady poring over her accounts. She greeted them kindly and pushed back her papers with a rueful laugh.

"Nay, I am glad to be interrupted!" she exclaimed in answer to Mehitable's apology, "'Tis a task, to make army rations serve a general's table. My poor head be aweary trying to stretch portions and menus! Master Timothy?" she added, in response to Mehitable's inquiry. "Ah, this be one of his bad days, my child. I fear his mother will

allow no one to see him. I will ask her, an ye wait, however!"

"Nay!" Mehitable started up. "Please disturb no one. We will come again, mistress. An ye give me the thread Mistress Lindsley desires, Charity and I will go back, I think, for"—she glanced out of the window, against which the snow was drifting in such moist, wet quantities as to shut out the light—"the storm be growing worse!"

They followed the housekeeper out into the hall and waited at the foot of the stairs while she went up to her room to get the desired thread. As they stood there, shy and rather ill at ease, suddenly there swept through the house a vague flurry of excitement, followed by a commotion outside the door. Measured footsteps sounded then upon the stairway, and General Washington, followed by Colonel Hamilton, descended, as hurriedly as his dignity would allow him. The Negro was already at the door, with his hand upon the latch, and now other servants came in, to line up in a respectful group, and as Mistress Ford came down the stairs, he opened the great door.

As Mehitable and Charity shrank back in embarrassment, a short, stout figure, much wrapped in furs, came up the outside steps from a sleigh and was met at the threshold by His Excellency, who, a tender smile upon his face, bent to kiss his wife.

Mistress Ford now stepped forward, a welcoming

smile upon her sweet face, also, and then the small, plump woman who was destined to be the First Lady of the Land was led up to her room by husband and hostess and the others, as the door of the built-in stairs closed behind that group, dispersed, scattering to their interrupted tasks.

Mehitable nudged Charity. "I think 'tis better for us not to wait, Cherry," she whispered. "Mistress Thompson, I fear, hath forgotten us!"

Charity, nodding, turned toward the front door. But as the two girls arrived there, a deep voice arrested their footsteps.

"How now, Mistress Condit? Hath yet found thy buckle?" And Mehitable, turning back, looked up into the smiling dark eyes of Alexander Hamilton.

"My sister Charity, sir!" She presented Charity to him. "Nay," she added sorrowfully, the introduction having been accomplished. "I have not seen it since the night the fellow Simpson took it! I wonder an he e'er reached headquarters wi' his stolen report? My brother and I saw him not long hence i' the woods—he attacked us wi' some other Tory villains—poor Tabbie, I did not tell her 'twas her brother among them, Charity." Mehitable interrupted herself to turn to the younger girl, who nodded her approval.

"I ha' not the least doubt Simpson reached British headquarters," returned Hamilton, replying

to Mehitable's half question. "The enemy have not molested us, at any rate. We have ye to thank for the ruse, mistress."

"Nay, I did naught!" protested Mehitable modestly.

"Nay—but you did!" answered Hamilton laughingly. "My child," the ancient young man of twenty-three or four looked at her in solemn admonition, "always accept praise when it be merited!"

Mehitable, at this, for her brother had told her of Hamilton's youth, could not control her twitching lips. Alexander Hamilton, glancing at her obliquely and reading aright the "Yes, Grandsire!" look in her dancing eyes, burst into irrepressible laughter, in which the two girls joined him, so that they were unaware of the descent of His Excellency, with Madam Washington and Mistress Ford, from the second floor until the three were upon them.

"Ah, Colonel Hamilton, how nice to meet ye once more!" exclaimed Madam Washington, hastening forward. Having greeted her husband's secretary, of whom she was very fond, with kindly warmth, she turned inquiringly to the two young girls.

"This be little Mistress Condit and her sister!" said His Excellency, advancing to Madam's side. "Captain Condit's relatives, my dear, from the Newark Mountains."

"I have heard o' ye, I believe, both from the general and your brother," said Madam Washington in her friendly yet dignified way. "I am glad to meet ye both!"

As she turned away with Mistress Ford, who was showing her about the house which was to be her winter home, the girls, curtseying, looked after her with keen interest. They saw a small, plump, well-formed woman in a simple gown and cap. A speckled homespun apron was tied around her waist, and in a knitting bag swinging from her arm could be noticed needles with a gray stocking well in the making on them. Upon retreating from a brief inspection of the parlor, Mehitable and Charity heard her mention Trenton.

"The Virginia troops were paraded i' my honor," she was telling her husband, with simple pleasure. She smiled again at the girls in passing. Colonel Hamilton was then summoned by his chief, and once more the girls turned toward the door.

"Wait!" said a breathless voice. Mistress Thompson, closing the door to the stair well behind her, hurried forward. "I am so sorry! First, I could not find the thread! Then Mistress Ford asked me to remain wi' her son while she came down to greet Madam Washington! There seemed no way o' letting ye know, for though there are many servants i' the house, yet, as is always the way, none passed Master Timothy's door just then.

And I liked not to ask Mistress Ford to charge her mind wi' telling ye!"

Mehitable took the little package of thread which Mistress Thompson handed to her, and putting it into her reticule, looked at the other laughingly.

"Your tarrying upstairs gave us opportunity to meet His Excellency's lady, so we feel not at all wrought up o'er your not appearing!" she remarked, curtseying. And Mistress Thompson instantly congratulated her, saying that not everyone could have that privilege, for Madam Washington was a home body, did not go forth abroad much, and generally was to be seen only by chance, as had happened that day.

"Come again, young maids," she said, nodding and smiling as she let them out the door.

Wending their way back through the storm, which had indeed grown worse, and now blew them along toward home with a wintry force that made them lean upon the wind, with their capes and their skirts flying out in front of them as though leading the way, the sisters were full of their unexpected glimpse of the great lady.

"But she be so *homelike!*" said Mehitable, in a disappointed voice. "I thought to see a fine lady!"

"Aye, so did I, wearing a gown o' silk and satin! Why, Hitty, she—she might ha' been *Mother*, wi'

her apron and her knitting and all!" Charity looked thoughtful as she scuffled along through the snow. "She is just like anybody! Yet," she added in her sensible way, "'tis doubtless better for General Washington that she be only a homebody, since his home, these war years, must be such as she can make it for him. And fine ladies —the ones who dress i' silks and satins, ye mind— do not make real homes for any one very often! Ye know, Hitty, the more I think o't, the more sure I be that 'tis not always the fine ladies who wear fine clothes, anyway!"

CHAPTER XI

AT MISTRESS HEDDEN'S

"WHERE be Father going?" Mehitable's voice was surprised, though rather muffled because of her efforts to roll the heavy churn from the icy buttery to a warmer place in the Condit kitchen.

Her mother looked up smilingly from the bread she was mixing upon the table. A great fire blazed upon the hearth, sending out such terrific heat that it threatened to scorch objects nearer than halfway across the room, for this was baking day, and the Dutch oven must be made ready. The heat was borne by the family without protest, however. Outside it was zero weather. A cold snap had come which, rumor had spread, had frozen solid for many feet all of the rivers, including the Hudson, and had made accessible, by passage across the ice, even Staten Island.

"I think he is going to Newark, Hitty!" Mistress Condit's arms moved with the lithe, thumping motion of flattening the bread out and rolling it back deftly into a great ball of dough. "Why, dear?"

"Newark!" Mehitable bumped the churn upright and stood regarding her mother with bright, disappointed eyes, "Oh, Mother—I thought he was going next week!"

"Well—I don't know." Mistress Condit shook her head absently, presently adding: "What difference does it make, Hitty? Surely ye were not thinking o' asking to go! Why," she protested, "I've only just gotten my two little maids back home, and here ye want to traipse again!"

"But, Mother"—Mehitable's tone was dignified, reasonable—"hast forgotten about the uniforms for the 'Blues'? We promised to help Mistress Hedden with them when we saw her at the Jones's last week!"

"Lawk, so we did!" Mistress Condit's expression was one of startled remembrance. "I had indeed forgotten! And, of course, your father won't go again to the Town by the River so soon!"

"Of course not!" agreed Mehitable, her manner mild. "Now"—she looked up briskly—"suppose ye ask Father to delay but a little while, and I will get the butter made. Then I will pack a saddlebag and plan to stay all night at the Heddens', as can Father, for Mistress Hedden hath often told him he was welcome—and we will be back tomorrow. 'Tis too cold for you and Cherry to venture forth; but I am tough and don't mind and we can keep our promise, Mother. The 'Jersey

Blues,'" finished the girl diplomatically, "ought not to suffer for lack o' uniforms because o' us womenfolk failing to do our part!"

"Aye, 'tis true!" Patriotic Mistress Condit was appealed to, as her wily young daughter knew she would be, in her most vulnerable spot. "Samuel," she addressed her husband, at that moment passing through the kitchen, "will ye not wait for Hitty to make the butter so that she may go with you to Newark?"

"Now, Mother!" Squire Condit stopped in the middle of the room and looked at her in reproachful dismay. "Cannot I plan to go out without being thus hindered? I am all ready, as ye can see." He gestured toward his boots and tapped the greatcoat he was wearing. "Besides," he started to pass his wife, as though the matter were ended, "it be much too cold for Hitty to venture forth!"

He reckoned without the lady, however. Mistress Condit, her floury arms outflung, stepped laughingly in front of him, barring his passage. "Now, Samuel, ye know what the end will be, so just make up your mind to yield at once!" she exclaimed, threatening to touch him and making him dance backward to avoid her.

Squire Condit burst into helpless laughter. "Nay, I surrender!" he cried, dodging with chuckling fear the floury hands which gestured so perilously close to his coat. "I will wait, though

I can't see why Hitty should have to go this terrible weather," he grumbled, seating himself upon a chair to kick off his boots. Thoughtful Charity appeared at his elbow with the bootjack, then turned to her mother.

"Why not let me make the butter, then Hitty and Father could start at once?" she implored.

"Nay!" Mehitable bustled about. "Ye are not strong enough! But I will let you salt it, Cherry."

An hour or so later, two muffled figures set forth upon horseback from the Condit gate. Charity, watching them wistfully through the window, turned at last silently back to the fireplace. Her mother watched her with tender eyes.

"Why," said Charity half to herself, seating herself in the inglenook and taking up the stocking she was knitting for Young Cy, "why must I ever be the one to wait at home! It must be so fine to be strong and able to go forth as Hitty does!"

"Yet, mayhap it is safer to wait at home," answered her mother quietly, shoving the pans of rising bread nearer the fire. "That's all right, dear—don't move!" she added. "I want ye to remain near the warmth of the fire, too, this bitter day. Suppose the British"—she went back to her first thought—"suppose they were to raid Newark this night, Cherry! Home would then seem a pretty good place to be in!"

"This bitter night, Mother!" answered Charity

scornfully, for once not to be cheered. "Nay, the British like their comfort too well to venture forth this night!" And she fell into a gloomy reverie, wishing she might have formed a third of the little Newark-bound group, for the days, after their exciting Morris Town visit, seemed doubly monotonous.

Mehitable, doubtless because she was glad to get away from their Newark Mountain farm, was chatteringly happy, jogging along beside her father.

"And the American raid over to Staten Island was a failure, ye say, Hitty?" Squire Condit returned to the topic which had excited his interest ever since his daughter, primed with the latest war news, had returned from the army encampment.

"Aye, for all Quartermaster Lewis got the three hundred sleds together for the army, sir! They marched to Elizabethport and went across on the ice to Staten Island. They do say about three thousand men went, under Lord Stirling." Mehitable was as loquacious, and her father listened as eagerly, as though it were the first time, instead of nearer the tenth, that she had told of the incident.

"And the British had got word o' our army's coming?" prompted Squire Condit.

"Aye, Father." Mehitable sighed. "The expedition, forsooth, was a rank failure, for our men

not only returned without the supplies they had hoped to capture; but about five hundred o' the soliders had their feet frozen. They came back to Kemble Hill much the worse for the raid."

"Too bad, too bad!" The Squire fell to ruminating sadly. "Though, of course, His Excellency could not have forseen the result!" he added loyally.

Passing the Ranfield Tavern, Mehitable and her father were hailed by Master Ranfield, who was busy at the well. As they reined their horses in surprise, he swung the well sweep to rest and came toward them.

"Good-morrow, Squire! Morrow, mistress!" He touched his forelock. "Did ye miss naught after leaving here that even last month?" he asked the young girl with twinkling eyes.

Mehitable knitted her brows. "Why, aye, Master Ranfield!" she exclaimed, then. "'Twas a little rush-woven basket, was it not! I ha' ne'er thought o' it since." She turned in laughing explanation to her father, as Master Ranfield smilingly went into the inn to fetch her property. "Mistress Wright did give it me wi' a piece o' Scotch cake and its recipe for my mother that day, and I must have left it here later i' my hurry to get away. The cake will be dry indeed; but the recipe is worth saving, and the basket must be returned to Mistress Wright." Then, as Master Ranfield,

returning, handed the basket to her, she thanked him.

"I found it on the table full o' my wife's belongings—thread and wax and letters," he observed. "She being out, I dumped everything out, and now I shall pray someone will come e'er my mistress discovers what I ha' done"—Master Ranfield sighed half-jokingly, half in earnest—"for she doth not scold an there be strangers present!"

"Poor Master Ranfield, I envy him not his lot!" remarked Mehitable, a moment later, urging old Dulcie into a trot as her father's horse started away.

"The woman Ranfield doth indeed possess a shrew's tongue!" responded the Squire, thinking affectionately of his own sweet-natured wife.

They were silent for awhile, then Mehitable, tying the little basket to her saddle, idly plucked out of it a torn piece of paper. For a second, she thought it was the cake recipe which Mistress Wright had written; but, examining it, she saw the words "will see ye soon. Write out such information as can obtain price and——"

Mehitable glanced up excitedly, then she checked the words upon her lips. With a glance at her father, who had noticed naught, she tucked the piece of paper away in her reticule, resolving to find some excuse for stopping at the Ranfield Tavern on her return and there investigate for herself.

If Mistress Ranfield were a paid spy in British service, Mehitable meant to know it!

Everywhere, now, nearing the Town by the River, though the devastation was covered by the kindly snow, they saw the blackened barns and half-ruined houses left by enemy raids. Mehitable, eyeing them, spoke wrathfully.

"Ah, Father—an we could only go to England and spoil *their* homes thus!"

"Nay, Hitty!" The Squire shook his head sadly. "Wish not for more mischief to be caused in the world!"

"Think you the British will try to avenge General Washington's attack on Staten Island?" asked the girl. "Newark must suffer an they do!"

"It will not be soon, I feel sure," said her father, "for it is too cold to suit the enemy! The British, as well as the fat Hessians, like their comfort well. And now, Hitty"—his tone became businesslike as they rode into the village of Newark—"I will leave ye at Mistress Hedden's. Tell the lady, however, Hitty, that I will not put her to the trouble o' bedding me. I must see some men this evening and will stay at the Eagle Tavern."

"Oh, Father!" Mehitable was quick to protest; but afterward how glad she was that her father had not yielded.

As they drew rein before the Hedden residence on Broad Street—the main thoroughfare running

north and south on which were many handsome residences, Squire Condit reached over and caught the bridle of his daughter's horse, preparatory to leading him away to the tavern stable.

"Farewell, Hitty!" he said, nodding. "Giddap, General!"

"Wait!" Mehitable, who had leaped to the ground, sprang after him as he started away. She slipped upon the icy road, was up and ran after her father wildly as he jogged unheedingly away, to the great amusement of various interested faces in neighboring windows. "Father, wait ye!"

Squire Condit, turning in his saddle and perceiving the figure of his daughter running after him, brought his horse to an abrupt halt.

"How now, Hitty?" he asked, much amused, also.

"My bag—the saddlebag!" gasped Mehitable. "My 'housewife' be in it! How could I sew upon the uniforms an ye take my sewing things to the Eagle Tavern, Father!" She looked up at him reproachfully as she unslung the bag. "Now ye may go!" She gave him laughing permission at last and held up the bag triumphantly.

Mistress Hedden greeted her smilingly, having seen the incident from her window. "I thought it must be you, Hitty! Town girls do not run so well!" Then, as Mehitable blushed, she added laughingly: "That was a compliment, my child."

She led the way past her parlor into the warm kitchen at the end of the hall. "Ye are just in time, for Mistress McWhorter, our pastor's wife, and my daughter are but now cutting out the uniforms!"

Mehitable followed her rather shyly; but the kindly manners of both Mistress Hedden and her daughter soon put her at ease, and in a little while her fingers were flying as swiftly as any.

As they sewed, the ladies laughed and chatted. Mistress McWhorter was holding forth mischievously when Mehitable seated herself and took up a blue coat.

"I suppose," said the minister's wife, with a teasing glance at Mistress Hedden's daughter, who was betrothed to the lady's half brother, Captain Cumming, "I suppose ye be sorry, my dear, the uniform ye ha' there be not for John Cumming—'twould make it so much more interesting, forsooth—eh?"

"Fie, mistress, no fair to tease!" cried the young girl, blushing and tossing her head. "Tell us, Hitty"—she tried to divert the others' attention from her own crimson cheeks—"tell us whom ye would be cutting out *your* uniform for an ye could choose!"

Mehitable thought for a moment, then looked up blandly. "John!" she answered demurely.

"No fair!" Laughing, the other girl shook her head. "Brothers are not to be included. Besides,

that would be denying Mistress Nancy Livingston her privilege! She would then ha' no uniform to work on for her choosing!"

"She would—would have her cousin, Captain Anthony Freeman," murmured Mehitable. Suddenly, to her enormous confusion, she felt her cheeks reddening. The other girl, with a little cry, pounced upon her.

"How now, Hitty Condit, have I stumbled upon a pretty secret?"

"Indeed not! I have not the least interest in Captain Freeman! Of all the shallow, frittering creatures! Why, he hath reputation for being a wild young rake! Nay, not Captain Freeman, I prithee! Not him!" Mehitable spoke rashly and was rather taken aback when Mistress McWhorter, who had been listening in silence, now interrupted in her soft voice.

"Is't true, Hitty! Why, I thought him a very nice young man—not that kind at all!"

The blue uniform dropped into Mehitable's lap. "Ye—ye know him?" she stammered. How she wished, now, she had not spoken so hastily! Indeed, what proof, save the little fairy story of Charity's telling, had she that Anthony Freeman was at all rakish. "My dreadful tongue! Will I ne'er learn to control it!" she thought uncomfortably.

"Aye. He supped at our house yesterday

even," answered Mistress McWhorter quietly. "My husband is fond o' him, having known his parents before they died, as well as Mistress Nancy's parents, for years."

"But what—what was he doing in Newark?" exclaimed Mehitable. "I thought he was in Morris Town!"

"So he was," agreed Mistress McWhorter amiably. "He had to return some equipment borrowed from the Masons here for a festival in Morris Town."

"Did he return at once?" asked Mehitable eagerly. "I—I mean—is he——"

"But, Hitty," interrupted the other girl soberly, though her eyes betrayed her mirth, "I thought ye said ye were not in the least interested in the young man! Methinks your words belie ye!"

Mehitable's round chin lifted. "Nay, I am not interested!" she insisted. "'Tis only that—that—he be John's friend and—and—Nancy's cousin, and—and—well, he is John's friend, so it be perfectly natural I be—wishing to—to—know——"

"Aye, very natural!" agreed the other, bursting into laughter. "Don't try to explain, Hitty! Ye but make matters more complicated. And since ye are not interested in the young man, we will drop the subject and talk about John Cumming!" And to Mehitable's immense relief, then, the conversation was switched to another topic.

Half an hour later, however, Mistress McWhorter unexpectedly reintroduced Captain Freeman's name.

"In sooth, I do not know what to do wi' him," she was saying in a perplexed voice to Mistress Hedden. "He is to stay at the barracks another night e'er he returns to Morris Town, and unwittingly, not remembering the doctor and I were to dine out, I asked him to come to-night to supper. Of course, Mandy can serve him; but I fear it will be lonely for him to eat by himself."

"Whom are ye troubled about?" Mistress Hedden's daughter looked up from her giggling conversation with Mehitable. "Captain Freeman? Ah, Mother," she turned to Mistress Hedden, "do ask him over here! I pine to meet"—she shot a naughty look at Mehitable—"the terrible rake!"

"An you girls will not treat him politely, not a step shall he come!" admonished her mother. "Aye, send him here, for I know ye approve o' him"—she turned to the minister's wife cordially. "Hitty is doubtless mistaken!"

"Where are the barracks?" asked Mehitable, hoping that she *was* mistaken.

"In the new Academy," answered Mistress McWhorter.

"And very nice quarters the Academy makes!" said Mistress Hedden's daughter. She rose and, placing the coat she had been stitching upon a pile

of uniforms, stretched herself with a little yawn. "There, that one be done!"

"Well, here be plenty more!" laughed her mother. "So stand not there idling!"

The girl took the unfinished garment her mother held out to her and returned to her seat beside Mehitable.

"Since the enemy ha' been so bold, we have had soldiers from the Continental Army in Newark here, doing picket duty on the west bank o' the Passaic River," she remarked.

"Aye?" responded Mehitable. But her tone was absent. Over and over would come that picture of certain reproachful dark eyes, thrusting out the real scene of firelit dining room and busy seamstresses. She sighed.

"Why do ye do thus, Hitty?" Drawing near, Mistress Hedden's young son, who had been watching Mehitable, imitated her by giving vent to a loud, long sigh. "Ye do make such funny faces! First ye smile and then ye frown!"

Mehitable hastily offered him a comfit from her pocket, and in the confusion of Mistress McWhorter's leave-taking, the child's words, to her relief, were unnoticed.

That evening, Mehitable hesitated on the stairs before descending to enter the Hedden parlor. Her thoughts were at war. She was in a quandary. Being sweet-natured as most quick-tempered folk,

her better impulse was to greet Captain Freeman like the old friend he was, frankly showing him she was sorry for her rudeness to him that first meeting at Mistress Lindsley's. She owed him, besides, a debt of gratitude she had not yet allowed him to guess she was aware of. Then Charity's fairy tale, like an ugly snake thrusting its head up in warning, caused her heart to sink.

"Oh, I wish Cherry had minded her own affairs and told me naught o' her silly tale!" thought Mehitable crossly. "Though she did it for mine own good. Yet mayhap Nancy was mistaken—Mistress McWhorter thought so—and the good mistress be right—he *doesn't* look that kind—he——"

She faltered miserably again at the half-closed door when, with leaden feet, she had reached it. Then her courage returned, and raising her chin in derision at her own cowardice, she pushed open the door, meaning to walk in and offer her hand in friendly greeting to Captain Freeman.

But, alas for all of Mehitable's good resolves! Captain Freeman and his young hostess, Mistress Hedden's daughter, were laughing and whispering in the corner and did not even glance up at her entrance.

Now, it is one thing to come, full of a noble desire to make atonement, to a person whom one has wronged; but quite another to find that person as

happy as though the apology had been offered. In the close proximity of dark hair to yellow curls, of intimate giggles and the little hand which Mistress Hedden's daughter had placed upon a buff and blue sleeve as she gazed merrily up into her guest's black eyes, all of poor Mehitable's doubt and suspicions rushed back upon her.

"The fairy tale *is* true!" she thought passionately, to herself.

So her curtsey was stiff, indeed, when at last the young soldier did glance up and spring to his feet. Captain Freeman's bow—for he had learned his lesson, poor fellow!—was then as formal as her curtsey was stiff and the next moment both young people turned away, each hurt to the quick by the other's behavior. Mehitable swept over to seat herself beside Master Hedden, a mild-faced, kind-mannered man who, as the evening progressed and his youthful guest did not stir from his side but apparently hung engrossed upon his words, became quite flattered by her interest, and later told his wife that "Hitty Condit was a most amiable and bright maid!" How could the deluded man know that Mehitable's answers were only by some happy chance coherent, and that every bit of her attention was really centered upon the young couple across the room.

Mehitable was not comforted, either, by Mistress Hedden's daughter observing in her ear, as

they went out to the supper table, "Ye be right, Hitty! The young man is a *fascinating flirt!*"

So passed that evening, and at last Captain Freeman bade them farewell. After his departure, Mistress Hedden was upon her way to bed when she noticed that her husband was still in low-voiced conversation outside the door. When he came in, shivering and rubbing his icy hands together, Mehitable, halfway up the stairs, heard his wife reproach him.

"Why, Father, art foolish to stand outside wi' Captain Freeman this cold night! What had he to say?"

Master Hedden laughed at his wife's curiosity as he closed and bolted the front door. "Captain Freeman tells me there be much agitation against me," he told her. Then, at her quick look of anxiety, he burst out, "But I care not! I be i' the right to enforce the laws o' the State! Let those Tories who are angry wi' me, when I warn them, take the oath o' allegiance an they do not want their property confiscated!"

"'Tis too bad ye ha' created so many enemies, however, Joseph, e'en though ye do be pursuing your official duties!" Mistress Hedden shook her head as she followed her husband upstairs. "Neighbors turning thus against neighbors i' this most dreadful war!"

It was late when the two girls, who slept together, dozed off—for Mistress Hedden's daughter had had to explain that she really cared only for "her John," and had been merely laughing and passing the time with Captain Freeman, and Mehitable, too proud to do other than accept the other's explanation, had related sundry interesting, though very innocent, tales of Morris Town—it was late, I say, when the summoning blows came upon the Heddens' front door, so that Mehitable thought at first it was morning and that they were being summoned to breakfast.

Someone moved in the moonlit room, grasped her arm. "Best get up, Hitty!" whispered Mistress Hedden's daughter hoarsely. "Mother hath gone down to answer the door, yet had we better dress!"

Springing out of bed to draw on her clothes with fumbling, desperate fingers, Mehitable asked, "Think ye it be a British raid?"

"Aye," choked the other. "Oh, Hitty, ever are Mother and I fearful they come for Father—the feeling be so bitter against him among the Tories because he has had to prosecute those who will not take the oath o' allegiance!"

"Nay," said Mehitable soothingly, thrusting her feet into her slippers. "Do not fear—it may be only a neighbor come in case o' sickness for your

mother's help!" She reached up to fasten her dress as she spoke.

But the next instant her arms dropped rigidly to her sides. There came the sound of men's feet tramping upon the stairs.

CHAPTER XII

FIRE

THERE was a man's cry from the next room. Back came the tramping feet, with the added sound of a heavy body being dragged along the floor. Opening the door, Mehitable peered out, and in the moonlight recognized the half-clad figure of her host being hustled and harried down the stairs. With a thrill of horror, she hurried after the red-coats and their victim.

Then there was enacted in that little hallway a scene of wildest confusion. The Heddens' youngest child was crying forlornly in a corner. Their daughter knelt beside them as the father and mother clasped each other in farewell. The next moment, Mistress Hedden was forced away from her husband.

"Back, fool—your husband be under arrest!" the British officer in charge told her roughly.

"Joseph!" Breaking away from the two soldiers who held her, poor Mistress Hedden ran toward her husband. Mehitable, staring in awful terror, saw her reel back from the point of the

bayonet that one of the guard brutally lowered at that instant. She sprang to catch her; but Mistress Hedden jerked away from the pitying arms and desperately pursued the invaders down the front steps out into the bitter cold.

"Let him dress!" she screamed. "At least, in the name o' humanity, let him dress an ye must take him! See"—her sobbing voice came back to the two horror-stricken young girls—"he has no shoes on! His feet will be frozen this bitter night! Ah—Joseph!"

Again Mehitable sprang to the poor wife's rescue, for again the brute of a soldier lowered his bayonet point. For the second time Mistress Hedden reeled back, this time with wounded cheek. She sank through Mehitable's arms on to the snow, sobbing hysterically.

Mehitable turned to the other girl, who seemed turned to stone. "Take your mother into the house!" she bade her roughly, shaking her. "I will go and see what they intend to do wi' your father!"

A lurid glare now broke across the night. "The red-coats be firing the town!" thought Mehitable, with the calmness of utter despair. "Newark is doomed!"

She felt as though she were in the midst of a nightmare as she ran after the invaders, who were hustling their victim down Broad Street. The

British soldiers were joined by another group, with another prisoner, as Mehitable pursued them, using every tree and fence corner to protect herself as she flew along.

Someone ran past her in the opposite direction. "Academy's burning!" shrieked an unknown voice.

Mehitable never forgot that night. She fell more than once upon the sharp ice, and more than once she rose with her teeth gritted and useless tears in her eyes. Always, however, she managed to keep the tragic, marching group in sight. Once, one of Master Hedden's guards, glancing back, thought he saw an avenger after them, and raising his musket, he fired. Mehitable, dropping behind a fence, prayed that he would not return. Later, peeping, she saw that the rash guard was being heartily kicked by his superior officer in reprimand and she again commenced her Indian tactics of dodging and running, crouching and creeping.

Nearing the house of Eleazer Bruen, a staunch admirer of Master Hedden who lived on Market Street, about halfway to the river, the brutal party was halted momentarily. Staring through her tears, Mehitable saw Bruen dash out of the house and, at the risk of incurring the anger of the redcoats, throw a blanket about his poor friend's shoulders. Just then, the western sky behind them flared and the girl was near enough to hear the leader of the cruel band exclaim:

"Gad! 'Tis good we are on our way. I told Lumm the countryside would be swarming to the rescue! These farmers are fighters when they arm! Forward!"

It was at this point that Mehitable, spent, cold, turned back. She was sure, now, from the direction they were taking, that the enemy intended to march Master Hedden, with his fellow prisoner, straight across the frozen rivers and Newark meadows—which were in reality swamps—to New York.

Master Bruen caught sight of her as she stepped out into the moonlight from behind a tree. He hailed her, inviting her into his house.

"Nay, I must get back to the injured wife!" she said, and at his shocked question, she related what had happened.

Master Bruen's face worked. "Poor, poor Joseph!" The tears ran down Bruen's face. "His feet will be frozen—this be one o' the worst nights I have ever known! An he be thrown into the sugar-house prison, I fear he will lose his feet!"

Mehitable cried out at that. Then, as though she could bear no more, she turned and went swiftly away, leaving Master Bruen to go alone into his house, stunned and saddened by the misfortune which had overtaken his friend.

Nearing the center of the village once more,

Mehitable began to meet hurrying groups of townsmen. The doors or houses, as news of the British retreat began to be circulated, were commencing to be flung open, windows were being unbarred and unshuttered. Here and there, scattered red-coats and patriots fired at each other, and once Mehitable, running through the snowy streets, felt her foot kick some object. She picked it up mechanically and, discovering it to be a pistol, put it under her arm and went on.

She was caught in an eddy of people milling helplessly before the burning structure of the Academy which, built in 1774, had been Newark's pride. Fascinated, she paused for an instant to watch window panes cracking outward from the intense heat, and as she stood there, she was accosted by a panting, frightened little figure.

"Hitty!" A hoarse, babyish voice spoke her name, two grimy hands jerked at her cape. Looking down, Mehitable recognized the trembling, weeping youngster as Master Hedden's small son.

Drawing him to the edge of the crowd, she knelt down and put her arms around his shuddering little body.

"Hitty," began the child again, "I saw——"

"You saw what, dear?" she encouraged him. "Why, however did you get here?"

"I climbed out o' a back window at home. I

was scared!" said the little fellow. He sobbed aloud, all at once. "I saw—you know—that man who supped wi' us to-night——"

"Yes—Captain Freeman?" Mehitable's heart jumped. Her arms tightened instinctively around the child. "What about him, dear?" she asked steadily.

"Nay, how can I tell ye and you hold me so tightly!" protested the little boy, then, as Mehitable dropped her hands to her sides, he leaned over and whispered importantly in her ear: "I saw two men take him into an old house—an old, *old* house all broken and—and—with no one in it, Hitty! They had him tied—he could not walk very well—and I followed 'cause I liked him, he told me such nice stories this even afore supper." Here the little fellow paused, choked. "Oh, Hitty, what have they done wi' my father?" he suddenly whimpered, remembrance rushing upon him.

"The British are taking him to New York Town, dear; but don't you fret—we will get him back again!" Mehitable comforted him, every inch of her protesting at losing precious time. "And now," she said quietly, "go on about Captain Freeman. Mayhap you and I can go and help him!"

"Truly!" The child squared delighted little shoulders. "Come, Hitty—I will show you the way!" And he darted away.

But Mehitable called him back. "Tell me more, first, dear—Hitty does not want the bad men to tie her, too!" she commanded. Then, as the little boy returned obediently to her, she patted his arm. "Tell Hitty all about it!" she coaxed.

"I went up the broken stairs after him—Hitty, why does no one live in that funny old house?—and—and—the two men tied Captain Freeman to a bed," answered the child. "And then—I ran away, because they were going to light their tinder boxes, they said, and—and—burn the poor captain all up, and—and—I did-dunt want to be burned!"

Mehitable sprang to her feet. "Come, let us go! Show Hitty the way!" she cried, and with the little fellow running on before her, she flew down Broad Street and around corners until he stopped and pointed triumphantly.

It was, as the child had said, a deserted old house. But in an upper window the girl caught sight of a light. Swiftly she turned to her little companion. "Dear, can you act like a big, big man?" she asked, kneeling down once more before him.

"Aye, Hitty!" He nodded his curly head. "Aye, I can!"

"Then run for help! Stop the first men ye come to—so they be not red-coats—and ask them to come and get poor Captain Freeman out o' danger!" She placed her hands, folded together as

though in prayer, against the childish breast. "That is what a real man would do!" she told him smilingly.

"I will, Hitty!" And, with a smothered shout, the little fellow turned and scampered away.

Creeping forward, then, Mehitable softly pushed open the crazy front door which hung ajar upon its hinges. She had often passed the old place in happier days and even then, in the bright sunshine, it had seemed to stare back at her haggardly, ghost-ridden, a storehouse of sad memories.

She entered the musty hall noiselessly, catching her breath as a rustling and a scamper near by proclaimed some live thing. "'Tis a rat!" she reassured herself, and grasping the pistol, which she had retained all this time, more firmly in her hand she tiptoed across the hall to the foot of the stairs.

Again she paused. Vacant rooms opening from the hall seemed peopled with dim figures. A moving shadow that crept across the floor toward her made her heart thump until she discovered it to be caused by a shutter, flapping and banging in the wind outside.

She looked up the rickety stairs. From above she now heard voices, a man's harsh laugh. And at that laugh, she flung up her head. One step and stop! Two steps and stop! The third step creaked and, crushing the back of one hand against

her mouth to keep from screaming, she crouched in terror. Listened.

"What's that?" she heard someone say.

A laugh barked out again. "What, Simpson—hast gotten woman's nerve? Why, 'tis the wind, fool!"

"I tell ye, Hawtree," Simpson's voice came back at the other angrily, "I will not have ye call me fool even in jest!"

The other laughed loudly. "In jest! Ho, that be good! A jest, indeed!"

There was a sullen silence—then, evidently cowed by the older man, Simpson could be heard smashing wood, muttering savagely.

"For firewood!" thought Mehitable sickly. "I wonder an it be!"

Spurred on by the awful thought, she went up the rest of the stairs at a bound and came abruptly into a room. Her circular glance took in the whole scene, even as her shaking hand slowly steadied and aimed her pistol at the two men on the farther side of the room.

"Gentlemen, ye are my prisoners!" she said. And almost laughed in their astonished faces.

It was Simpson who tried to reach the guns, thrown carelessly into a corner. Mehitable threatened him angrily with her pistol and he crouched back upon his heels. To the right of the door, facing her upon a ragged pallet, bound and gagged,

lay Anthony Freeman. His horrified eyes begged her to flee. Mehitable looked at the Tories in the flickering light of a single candle.

"Ye are in direct line with one another!" she told them grimly. "A ball has been known to go through two people at once! Better remain where ye be!"

There must have been something deadly in her strained, desperate young voice, for the two rogues licked their lips furtively and stayed as she had ordered. Only Hawtree spoke.

"We will not hurt ye, mistress!"

Mehitable stared at him scornfully. "Say ye so!" she ejaculated in pretended surprise. Then her voice changed abruptly. "See that ye do not move! I will decide what to do from now on!"

At last Hawtree broke the silence with a sniff. "Decide quickly, mistress!" he begged. "The house be fired!"

As he spoke, a tongue of flame shot out from the corner where Simpson had been piling wood and the girl saw, with growing horror, that fire had been smouldering there.

"Very well—cross to the door!" Like the snap of a whip her voice gave the order. The two Tories got to their feet and marched across the room to the door. "Halt!"

As they came to a full stop, Mehitable moved backward toward the window. "I am at the

window, Master Hawtree!" she said then and his quick glance told him it was so. "I sent for help before I entered here and now I see the men coming. They are running! Heaven help ye an they catch ye to-night, for their tempers be not of the best! An ye desire to live, therefore, sirs, you had better make for the rear o' the house and so escape that way. Ye'd better not return! Now—*go!*"

The two men, like arrows shot from the same bow, burst out of the room together, and Mehitable could hear them clattering down the rickety stairs. With a bound, she was at the door, peering over the ancient banisters. She saw them disappear beneath the stair balcony, toward the rear, as she had ordered. But she was wise in their ways, and it was not until she had run to a window at the back and had seen them fleeing madly across back lots that she was satisfied.

Rushing back, then, Mehitable threw her pistol upon the floor and tried to beat out the flames which, during her short absence, had gained considerable headway. But as fast as she caught and destroyed one tongue of fire, another would reach up tendrils of desire, and she soon saw that it was hopeless.

She bent over the pallet. "I cannot put the fire out!" she half sobbed. "Oh, Anthony—'tis beyond me!"

She ran swift fingers over his recumbent form.

"Feet tied! Arms tied behind ye! And gagged!" She checked them off and looked around her despairingly. Smoke was now billowing and swirling up from the pile of wood in ever-increasing spirals. "I have no knife!" Then, as a gurgle came from Freeman's lips, she raised his head and tugged at the kerchief which thrust open his mouth. To her joy, the knots gave way—Hawtree having tied them more carelessly, figuring that, with hands and feet tied, Captain Freeman would have no means to reach the gag.

"Take a stick and burn the knots on my hands!" directed the young officer as soon as the gag was out of his mouth.

Mehitable shrank back. "Nay, I dare not! I might burn ye!"

"Do as I bid you!" He spoke so sternly that, from sheer surprise, Mehitable picked up a burning stick of wood and carried it over to the pallet. But it was too tedious a job. The hemp refused to burn at once. And already the thick smoke had them choking and gasping.

"The pistol—fire it and the ball will cut the knot on my wrist an ye hold it steady!" panted the man.

Mehitable wrung her hands. "It is empty!" she cried. "The pistol be not loaded!"

"And ye dared to come up here unarmed!" His eyes gave her homage. "Gad, ye be brave, little Mistress Madcap!"

There was a short silence, Mehitable's mind grasping, refusing, seeking schemes for escape. Suddenly, Anthony Freeman spoke again.

"The others—ye said others were coming to our rescue!" Hopefully, he seemed to be listening.

"'Twas but a ruse!" groaned the girl. She turned upon him. "I must drag you, or we shall both be burned! I can pull you along the floor—I am strong! Roll yourself off from the cot, and I will take you beneath the arms! Thus!" And bending her lithe young back, as he obediently rolled on to the floor, she placed her arms around his chest and commenced to drag him backward.

How could she ever have thought him slender and tall, thought Mehitable despairingly! Why, he weighed pounds and pounds more than she had thought. He tried to help her by hitching himself; but she soon begged him to stop, saying that she could manage better if he made himself perfectly limp. Halfway to the door, three quarters of the way, inch by stubborn inch she conquered that long expanse of floor space. If only the smoke did not make her eyes smart so! Tears were now running down her cheeks. Freeman, hearing a pathetic sniff, spoke desperately:

"I wish ye would not try! Ah, I fear 'twill hurt ye!"

But Mehitable shook her head, gritted her teeth as she had earlier in the evening, after falling time

and again on the ice. She had no breath with which to argue the question. She simply kept on pulling—and pulling—and at last they reached the open doorway.

There a draught of fresh air heartened them. With a great lungful of it Mehitable made short work of getting him to the head of the crazy stairs. And then the accident happened! She took one step too many! A moan, a struggle for balance and her own weight tore her arms away from her burden, so that she plunged backward down the stairs.

Anthony Freeman, his back still turned to the stairs, sat petrified for a few seconds; but the fire in that near-by room did not allow him time to despair. He swung himself around as though on a pivot, so that his bound feet were upon the steps, then, like a child at play, he bumped himself rapidly to the foot where Mehitable, curled up in a heap, lay silent.

He looked up at the fire which, encouraged by the draught from the rear door Hawtree had left open, was now grinning at him through the banisters on the second floor. It must have devoured the pallet in the prison room and had burst out the door, running along a strip of old carpet left by some former tenant. How long, wondered the young man dully, would it take to come down the stairs?

CHAPTER XIII

MAN PROPOSES

BUT some good fairy must have decreed that they were not to perish by fire! Anthony Freeman, not knowing this, had made a brave effort to help himself and Mehitable by working himself over to her motionless form and trying to shove it toward the door. But looking at the door, he had groaned, for Mehitable, for some unaccountable reason, had closed it behind her upon entering. It had seemed to mock him, because with his hands tied behind him, he had not been able to open it!

Well, they must escape by the open door in the rear, he had told himself! Give them time enough, please Heaven, and they could make it! This had been denied them, however, for glancing up, he had seen that the stairs were beginning to smoulder, that a thread of flame had already licked its way across the top step.

Anthony Freeman had worked frantically, then. Grunting, pushing that inanimate body of Mehitable's before him, he had gone only half a yard or

so when men's shouts had sounded outside and the front door had been flung open.

The ancient, evil hallway had seemed suddenly to swarm with men. Mehitable had been caught up in a pair of strong arms, knives had been whipped out, and Captain Freeman's legs and arms had become once more his own. Rising, he would have fallen, however, from sheer numbness, had not someone supported him and afterward helped him to safety.

It was a day or two after these exciting events that Mehitable, awakening from a doze, looked around her weakly. A lady turned away from the window and approached the girl's bed.

"Art hungry?" she asked kindly.

"Nay, Mistress Roberts." Mehitable shook her head.

Mistress Roberts seated herself beside the bed and, taking out a gray sock, commenced to knit. As she knitted, her face grew very sad, as well it might be. For she was Master Hedden's sister who, hastening across lots from her own home, upon hearing of his arrest, had remained to take charge of the disorganized household. To her care, then, Mehitable had been committed, after good Doctor Burnet had pronounced her uninjured save for minor bruises and the burns upon her hands.

"Hath heard from Master Hedden yet?" asked Mehitable, now.

Mistress Roberts sorrowfully shook her head. "Nay," she sighed. "And his poor, wounded wife —how she doth long for news!"

There was a little silence. Then Mehitable cleared her throat self-consciously.

"Hast heard from Captain Freeman?" she asked far too casually.

Mistress Roberts looked at her in a kind, unobserving manner. "Nay—he went back to Morris Town."

Back to Morris Town! Back without one word of inquiry or interest!

"I hope I am not going to weep!" thought Mehitable, agonizedly to herself, blinking very fast. "He does not care! Nay, but I *will* not weep!"

"The snow glare doth hurt your eyes, I fear!" remarked Mistress Roberts, glancing up from her knitting. She rose and, going over to the window, raised it and struggled with the shutter, which she finally got to close. "There—that be better, forsooth!" she said in a satisfied tone.

"Thank'ee," said Mehitable, a little gruffly. (*He does not care! He does not care!*)

There was a scrambling noise outside the door. Soon it opened, and a shy little face peered rather frightenedly into the darkened room.

"Come in here, sir!" Mistress Roberts smiled at her young nephew. "Come in and tell Hitty what ye did the other night!"

The little boy slid around the corner of the lintel and, step by step, finger in mouth, approached the bed.

"I ran away. I climbed out a window and ran away. Then I saw ye, Hitty."

"Aye—so ye did!" said Mehitable.

"I went on and on, after I left the old house," said the child. "I went to my aunt's in Wad—Wadsesson, Hitty—I did not want to come home. The red-coats might a-got me! My aunt brought me here in a sled, with two horses pulling it!" he added proudly.

Suddenly, Mehitable, regardless of her bandaged hands, leaned out of bed and caught him to her. "Little lad—so brave!" she cried, hugging him. She kissed his curly head and released him, to his squirming relief. "And ye *were* a big man!" she told him solemnly.

"Truly, Hitty! And did I help ye?" he asked with shining eyes. And when she nodded seriously, he regarded her delightedly. "But I don't like to be kissed, Hitty," he said in an aggrieved voice, moving precipitately toward the door, to vanish upon laughter from the two who were watching him.

Underneath the fun, however, Mehitable's heart continued to ache. Back came the old, suspicious anger, the doubt and the turmoil which Charity's fairy tale had aroused that time. Anthony Free-

man was, after all, just a play-boy, an unstable person of moods and fancies, a young man to whom the interest of the moment meant much and to-morrow nothing at all!

And what about the unknown lady Anthony had kissed at that long-ago masque—the lady he had told he loved! Most wonderful for Nancy and John, this clearing up of the little mystery! Aye, said Mehitable's tormented young heart—but what about *me!*

"Art hungry?" asked Mistress Roberts again, out of a somber silence.

Mehitable watched her flashing needles and sighed. "Nay," she said.

"Art hungry, Hitty?" It was Mistress Hedden's daughter this time, sticking her head in at the door. Her cheerful young face was like a bright gleam of sunshine. "Mother seems better and John hath come," she said radiantly.

"Nay, I'm *not* hungry!" said Mehitable gloomily. All the world seemed happy! "All the world —save me!" thought Mehitable, turning her face to the wall.

"Oh," said Mistress Roberts fussily. "That light doth indeed hurt your eyes! That be right! Turn away from it and rest them! Try to sleep, my child!"

She did not hear the howling, mocking laughter of Mehitable's heart.

But a few days later, being a strong, healthy young person, Mehitable, from old Dulcie's back, was waving farewell to a group of faces in Mistress Hedden's parlor window and trotting briskly down the street, with her father, mounted, beside her.

"Are ye sure ye can bear the long ride back to the Mountain?" asked Squire Condit anxiously, as they passed Newark's Four Corners, the village center where the town pump, some ten feet below the ground, was located. Villagers, coming and going from the pump, nodded cordial greetings as the Squire passed, for he was a prime favorite, and many were the nudges and looks of interest directed at Mehitable, too.

"Aye," answered Mehitable. "See, my mittens do protect my hands! Besides, the burns be on the backs, so when I hold Dulcie's bridle, thus, it does not hurt! The good beast seems to realize and obeys my slightest touch, too—don't ye, old Dulcie!" And the girl leaned forward to place her smooth cheek between the old horse's ears, which pricked back intelligently.

Nearing the Mountain Society settlement, as Orange was then called, Squire Condit noticed Mehitable's look of exhaustion and abruptly drew rein before the Ranfield Tavern.

"Come—let us stop here and rest, Hitty! May-

hap I can obtain possession o' some conveyance and drive ye the remainder o' the way home," he said, affectionate concern in his face as he helped her down from her horse.

"After a short rest, I shall be all right!" murmured Mehitable, lingering.

"Go ye on into the tavern, Hitty," he bade, noticing her hesitancy. "Or"—he remembered, all at once, the unpleasant episode which had occurred at the Ranfield Tavern before and thought Mehitable but natural in her reluctance to enter—"mayhap ye would rather ride on to Samuel Munn's tavern?"

But Mehitable's glance had happened to rest upon a little rush-woven basket still attached to old Dulcie's saddle, and she straightened her weary figure in sudden decision.

"Nay, let us rest here, Father," she said abruptly.

Rather puzzled, the Squire glanced at her, then, evidently granting her the whimsies of her sex, he nodded and turned away with the horses.

"Very well—go into the house. I will turn the beasts over to someone at the stable and see an Master Ranfield hath any suggestion to make as to a sled!"

Mehitable's feet were rather reluctant, though, as she went in through the tavern door. Only her sense of curiosity, patriotism, and, perhaps not so

fine a reason, her dislike for Mistress Ranfield and the girlish desire to see that lady paid back for her meanness that long-ago night, could have carried her forward.

The taproom was deserted. In the big fireplace, a lazy fire was snapping and sputtering. A steady murmur of voices came from the kitchen, and hither our heroine crept.

"It cannot hurt an I seat myself here beside the kitchen door!" she told herself excitedly. "Surely no one can prove I eavesdropped!"

But for all her words, Mehitable's heart began to pound rather heavily as she sat there, her bandaged hands lying motionless in her lap. Presently, the murmur developed into a distinct conversation.

"An this be all, mistress, I'd best go!" said a voice finally.

Mehitable listened eagerly. For it was the spy Simpson's voice!

"Wait!" That was Mistress Ranfield's voice, speaking hurriedly. "I must warn ye someone hereabouts doth know our secret. My husband stupidly did empty a basket which I had full o' my belongings, including letters. All of the letters I did recover, save a piece o' one which became torn i' the man's hurry to dump the basket's contents. He said he gave the basket to——"

"But why kept ye letters which might prove

dangerous witnesses against ye?" demanded Simpson's voice sharply.

"Nay"—Mistress Ranfield's shrewish voice assumed a whine—"I be sorry——"

"Sorry!" Simpson's voice hurled back scorn at her. "Much good thy sorrow will do thee when the noose be drawn tight!"

There was a sharp cry from Mistress Ranfield at these sinister words. Then silence. At last came a sigh from the woman.

"Well, the piece o' letter be gone," she said resignedly. Came the sound of a chair being scraped over the floor. Footsteps! "I know, at any rate, who hath the information and——" Suddenly the kitchen door flew open, and Mehitable found herself staring up into Mistress Ranfield's amazed face. "And here she be now!"

"Who?" Simpson peered over his fellow Tory's shoulder.

Mehitable sprang to her feet. Too late, at the look of triumph upon their faces, she realized how foolish she had been! Affairs were not turning out as she had planned at all, she told herself shakily. She was to have confronted Mistress Ranfield quietly and coldly in the presence of the woman's husband and Squire Condit and force the woman to give up her odious calling!

With a wild glance at the door, Mehitable took a step forward. The next instant, Simpson had

shoved Mistress Ranfield rudely aside and had leaped to Mehitable's side. His hand closed heavily upon her shoulder.

"Not so fast, mistress!" he told her fiercely. "When did ye enter this inn? And how much hath ye overheard?"

Mehitable flung up her head and looked at him proudly. "What concern o' yours, ye—spy!" she stormed.

Tense silence overwhelmed the three. The fire continued to sputter, and somewhere, Mehitable noticed vaguely, a clock ticked. Then Simpson, his handsome face malicious and ugly, turned to Mistress Ranfield.

"A rope for the rebel!" he ordered.

The inn mistress's thin yellow face slowly went dull red. "Ye"—she stopped and licked her lips; there was an odd, breathless hope in her voice, and her hands twitched, like a cat's paws about to play with a mouse—"ye mean to flog the rebel maid?" she asked.

But Simpson's face flushed. A pang went through Mehitable as his likeness to Tabitha showed momentarily.

"Nay," he said shortly. "We will take her into the kitchen and tie her to a chair—ye be sure your husband be not home?—Aye?—Then," he ended grimly, "can we discover how much she knows!"

So the two schemers pushed Mehitable out into

the tavern kitchen, which was deserted save for themselves. Casting one despairing glance over her shoulder—for where was her father all this time?—the girl went, docile enough. And maintained her composure while the hemp was being wound around her, binding her fast to a chair, until Mistress Ranfield grasped her mittened hands. Then Mehitable winced with pain.

"Stay!" And Simpson tore the mittens from her bandaged hands. "So the rescuer's hands came to grief!" he sneered. But a remnant of decency made him forbid the inn mistress to truss the burned hands.

"A gag?" inquired Mistress Ranfield, thrusting a roll of cloth toward him.

"Nay," he answered scornfully, "how can we discover what she knows an we gag her? Now, mistress"—he turned roughly to the girl—"best speak up, for ye have no bully brother to come to your rescue this time!"

Suddenly, a new voice spoke from the threshold: "But *I* am here!" it said pleasantly, and Mehitable, twisting herself in her chair, saw the young man, Aaron Harrison, whom her cousin, Jemima Condit, had married, and had left a widower in the previous November. "What be the trouble here?" he asked sternly, coming forward as his eyes rested in surprise upon Mehitable. "Hold!" There was the sight of his drawn pistol, all at once, and

Simpson, about to escape, turned slowly back, his hands held high above his head.

"Now," repeated Aaron Harrison, "what ill business goes on here?"

Unfortunately, his eyes went back to Mehitable for an instant, and in that instant Simpson saw his chance to escape. There was the sound of a chair crashing to the floor, the swift flight of a body hurtling itself toward the door, the belated flash of a pistol, and then they were all staring rather stupidly at the empty space Simpson had previously occupied.

At once, Mistress Ranfield became all concern. "Indeed, Major Harrison"—she fluttered over to Mehitable's chair and commenced to untie the knots of hemp—"indeed, 'tis well ye came when ye did! I was most frightened. For what could lone women do against such a desperate character as that unhappy young man!"

Mehitable gasped. Such amazing effrontery as this fairly took her breath away! But Aaron Harrison, turning back from the door whence he had strode to look out, gazed down sternly at the sly figure before him. Mistress Ranfield, at that, muttering that the fire in the taproom needed mending, got rather hastily to her feet. She was stopped, however, upon the threshold, by the young soldier's grim voice.

"Mistress," said Aaron Harrison, "try not to

deceive me! Ye are a suspect—indeed, e'en now there be proof o' your duplicity lodged wi' headquarters. To be proven a spy, whether man or woman, is to run the risk o' hanging! Be warned, now, for danger hovers o'er ye!" Then, as the inn mistress, ashen-faced, stumbled from the room, he turned to Mehitable and his expression changed. "Let me unbind ye, Hitty!" he said, an odd breathlessness in his voice.

"Thank ye, Aaron! Let us go into the other room—I like it not here!" Mehitable, as soon as she was free, stood up and walked toward the door. "Where can Father be! Well," she looked at him wonderingly, "what is it, Aaron?"

The young man, following her into the empty taproom, stood gazing at her absently. "Hitty," he burst out at last, "I was upon my way to your father's house! Canst guess why?"

Mehitable, gazing at him in the utmost astonishment as he sat down beside her on the inglenook bench, suddenly dropped her eyes at the tremendous meaning she read in his all at once.

But with realization came strong aversion to his meaning. Always Aaron had been a friend of the family, a brave young soldier—for he was a major in the American army—and likable, yet always the girl had thought of him as her cousin's lover and husband. Now the knowledge that he was seeking to replace his lost bride and that he would like to

put Mehitable in her place came as a real shock, so that the girl's cheeks burned and her bandaged hands fell to trembling. She raised a hand in embarrassed protest.

"Nay, Aaron!" she began.

But the young soldier spoke huskily. "Ah, Hitty, ye do not know how lonely I've been since —since November, Baby Ira and I!"

"But, Aaron——" Once more Mehitable essayed to speak, and once more the soldier stopped her.

"Nay, Hitty, give me no answer this day!" he pleaded earnestly. "Think the matter o'er! Mayhap ye could be more happy wi' us—the baby and I—than ye feel for now. Go to see the little fellow—Jemima's mother hath him for awhile—and let his baby face speak for us both!"

A little silence fell. Mehitable looked into the fire with dreaming eyes. Often she had heard light-minded girls boast of their conquests, counting over their proposals triumphantly as a miser does his pieces of gold. But here was neither triumph nor amusement! Only a sober-faced young father asking for companionship and understanding.

"Ah, Aaron," said Mehitable pitifully. She choked. "Life's so—so—queer!" she said breathlessly.

"Life can be—wonderful!" he said wistfully,

touching her bandaged hand gently. "For two—or three—together!"

Then, as the girl sat silent, hard thoughts came. Anthony Freeman did not care! Very well—Mehitable tossed her head—she would show him that she, in turn, did not care, show him, too, in a way that could not be mended! And with this not very laudable resolve, Mehitable stumbled to her feet.

"Aye, Aaron," she said breathlessly, "aye, I will go and—and—see the baby! And," her gaze sought the floor, "ye may come anon for your answer!"

Then, as both stood silent and rather ill-at-ease for a moment, with that flat feeling which always follows a climax, the door to the taproom opened.

"Art ready, Hitty?" asked Squire Condit's hearty voice. "How now, Aaron?" He nodded cordially to the young soldier. "Art going our way? Hitty tell ye her exciting adventures i' the Town by the River? Poor maid burned her hands quite badly! I do protest," he turned to Mehitable, "I ha' tramped halfway to the Mountain and back again for that sled! Well, Aaron?"

"Nay, I thank ye kindly—I ha' my horse outside," answered the soldier, his gaze upon the downbent face beside him. "And—Hitty did not tell me o' her burned hands. We—we—were talking o' other matters."

"I see," said the Squire drily. "Well, Hitty, art ready?" His tone changed to impatience as Mehitable did not move.

The girl started. "Aye, Father," she answered then, with a catch in her breath. (Ah, Anthony!) "Aye," her glance flashed back at the young soldier, half daring, half desolate, "aye, ready for *anything!*"

CHAPTER XIV

MAID DISPOSES

FOLLOWED, then, the long, leaden-gray days of midwinter. It was an extreme one of terrible cold, and even Mehitable, although she soon recovered from her adventures at Newark, was glad to hover over the fire which Squire Condit and Amos, the man of all work, kept roaring in the big kitchen fireplace.

But at last the girl could stand it no longer. "I cannot remain cooped up one hour more!" she burst out one afternoon. She looked at her mother, placidly spinning in the inglenook. "I think"—but here a blush stained Mehitable's cheeks—"I think I shall go down to Uncle Daniel Condit's. Poor Aunt Ruth needs a bit o' cheer since Jemima's death!"

Mistress Condit glanced up with a smile. "What said ye, Hitty?" she asked.

Mehitable raised her voice above the noise of the spinning-wheel, repeating herself. Mistress Condit thought idly, "How the fire's heat doth redden the child's cheeks!" and nodded her consent. And

soon Mehitable, bustling about, was ready for departure.

"Farewell, Mother!" She stooped to drop a light kiss upon the fair, faded cheek her mother serenely held up. "Tell Cherry where I went. What a long nap she be taking!"

Then, scuffling out through the deep snow, Mehitable directed Amos to saddle Dulcie.

"But, indeed, I like not for Dulcie to go out wi' her lame knee!" protested Amos with the privilege of an old servant.

"Oh, Amos!" The girl looked at him laughingly. "How ye do baby the horse!" And later, deciding Amos was overly careful, Mehitable put her to a trot. But soon poor Dulcie showed serious strain, for she began to limp at once.

"La!" Mehitable spoke aloud vexedly. "'Tis just my fortune! Well, I will leave ye at Uncle Dan's, Dulcie, and return on foot!"

A little later, she entered her aunt's sad kitchen like a bit of animated sunshine.

"How now, my dear!" It was her Aunt Ruth who spoke shiveringly from her place beside the fire. Beside her, as she knit, was a cradle with a sleeping child in it. She kept the cradle in constant motion with her foot upon one of the rockers.

"Indeed, we be very well at our house, Auntie!" answered Mehitable brightly, slipping out of her cardinal and warming her hands as she looked down

eagerly at the baby. "That is—all except Dulcie!" she added jokingly.

"Dulcie?" Her aunt drew down fretful brows.

"My horse," explained Mehitable, smiling. "Amos scarcely allowed me to ride her this afternoon; but forsooth, I guess he was right. She be quite lame. I fear I will have to leave her here and walk home."

"Mayhap your uncle will come before ye leave, Hitty. Then he can give ye a lift across the Valley," responded Mistress Condit.

There was a brief pause, during which the baby stirred. "Oh," begged Mehitable, "do let me take him! The sweet person!"

At her aunt's nod of permission, the girl bent over the cradle and carefully lifted the former's grandson, while Mistress Condit took her foot off the cradle rocker with a grimace of pain.

"It be all cramped," she explained. She studied the baby, a fine, sturdy little fellow of six months, with dispassionate eyes, as he crowed and laughed in the girl's arms.

"Aye, he be a good baby!" acknowledged the grandmother in her sad, crushed voice. "Mayhap, some day, I shall understand, though, why his mother had to give up her life for his, Hitty!"

"How proud Jemima would have been o' him!" exclaimed Mehitable, dancing around the kitchen with the baby. "See, Ira, that be your mother!

Throw a kiss to the pretty lady, your mother! So young and so pretty!"

She stopped, as she spoke, before the silhouette of a young girl and held the baby up. The little, wandering eyes, however, did not focus upon the silhouette. Instead, they rolled toward a red apple upon a near-by table.

"That be all *he* cares!" exclaimed the grandmother bitterly.

"Ah, don't, Aunt Ruth!" protested Mehitable pitifully.

"Nay, Hitty, think me not hard!" Her aunt rose hastily and, coming close to the girl, took the baby out of her arms almost as though she were jealous. "I do love Ira for himself!" She crushed the infant against her, and Mehitable looked to see his mouth draw down in a whimper; but, instead, he laughed. His grandmother, at that, covered his soft round head with kisses and carried him off to be fed.

Presently, she returned with a thick leather portfolio beneath her arm. Replacing the babe in his cradle, where he lay gurgling contentedly after his milk, she swept a clear space upon the table and opened the case.

"I don't believe I ever showed ye the diary my Jemima kept for almost six years," said the bereaved mother softly. "She had written much o' these troublous times, Hitty, and I doubt not little

Ira will value this greatly some day. It may even be of interest to others, years hence, who knows!"

Mehitable bent over the diary eagerly. It was contained in a handsome boxlike case and was written in a fine, slanting penmanship which did the country girl who had been her cousin great credit, for this was before the time of dame schools, and only boys were encouraged to seek education.

"Read it, Hitty!" said Mistress Condit. So, stooping lightly, the young girl read aloud an entry.

"'Monday, which was called Training Day. I rode with my Dear father Down to see them train, there Being Several Companyes met together. I thought It would Be a mournful Sight to See, if they had Been fighting in earnest and how Soon they will be Called forth to the field of war we cannot tell, for by What we Can hear the Quarrels are not Like to be made up Without bloodshed. I have Jest Now heard Say that all hopes of conciliation between Briten and her Colonies are at an end, for Both the King and his Parliament have announced our Destruction; fleets and armies are Preparing with utmost diligence for that Purpose!'"

Mehitable looked up. "That was just before the war, wasn't it?" she asked.

Her aunt, who had been listening with the tears rolling down her cheeks, lifted a knuckly hand to wipe her eyes. "Aye, Hitty," she said simply.

"It brings Jemima back, reading her diary does!" said Mehitable in a hushed voice. "It makes her so real again, Aunt Ruth!"

"Aye," nodded Jemima's mother. "'Tis wonderful!" Her hand patted the diary lovingly.

But Mehitable looked very sober, for she knew, at that moment, that she must tell Aaron Harrison she could not consent to fill her dead cousin's place.

"Ah, no, no!" she cried out silently. "I cannot be second choice, after all!"

Aloud, she said, as she went to find her cape, "Then ye will ask Uncle Dan to bed Dulcie for me? I will come for her soon."

"Aye! Or mayhap Aaron will be here soon—he comes whene'er he can to see his baby," nodded her aunt. "Farewell, Hitty. Come again!"

"Good-bye, little Ira!" Feeling strangely remorseful, Mehitable bent over the cradle again before going out into the wintry dusk.

She found, to her disgust, trudging off down the Swinefield road that led to the settlement of the Mountain Society, that she was not to be alone, for Benjamin Williams, whom she knew to be a bitter partisan of the King, accompanied her willy-nilly until he turned off at the junction of the First Road with the Swinefield one. As soon as his back was turned, she made a naughty little face after him, and was caught full in the act by a pretty

woman, who, followed by a Negro slave, was coming up the road from the direction of the settlement.

"Fie, fie, Hitty!" she laughed.

"Nay, would ye not like to do the same, Mistress Harrison?" demanded Mehitable boldly.

Mistress Katurah Harrison laughed and blushed at that, for it was well known that she was a lady of high spirit. "Mayhap, Hitty, mayhap!" she admitted, still laughing, passing the girl to go on to her home at the foot of the Mountain on the Northfield road.

How lonely we would have thought the girl's homeward way! Occasional farmhouses broke the monotony of field and forest; but always, upon her left, stretched the swamp, dark and mysterious even in winter. Mehitable plodded along uncomplainingly, however, her thoughts dwelling upon the sad fate of Jemima Condit, her cousin, who had found love and motherhood and death all in one short year.

At last, though, she came out of her reverie with a start to find that the dusk had deepened to darkness, that the candles from Master Ned Tomkins's inn at Freemantown shone out warningly. She hastened her steps a trifle, for she knew her mother would worry at a late return. Besides, she disliked passing any public inn, for there were apt to be loiterers who, seeing her alone, might attempt

unpleasant gallantries. To her disagreeable ur-prise, then, as she drew abreast the inn, a party of horsemen issued forth and one of them accosted her.

She started to run, but the young man who had spoken to her ran after her.

"Hitty! Hitty! Are ye daft, then?" called a voice, and glancing over her shoulder, the girl saw that it was her brother, John Condit, who was pursuing her. She stopped abruptly and looked at him crossly.

"Eh, John—ye ought to commend me 'stead o' scolding me!" she protested sharply. She retraced her steps and her tone softened. "What are ye doing here, John?" she exclaimed, a broad smile dawning upon her face.

"I am with His Excellency's party. But why are ye walking alone this late, Hitty?" John kissed her. "His Excellency be looking your way, Hitty," he admonished her.

The girl swept a curtsey in the direction of a massive figure seated upon a horse before the inn. General Washington greeted her kindly and spoke to a slender, sandy-haired young man about to mount his horse near by. "General La Fayette," he said, "this is Mistress Condit, sister o' our aide, Captain Condit, sir."

To Mehitable's secret embarrassment, the young Frenchman bounded off from his horse and dashing

over to her, seized and imprinted a kiss upon her hand.

"Mam'zelle, eet is a shame!" he exclaimed. "We have but now finished the so excellent dinner —cabbage and—and—flesh o' the pig. Pork? Ah, yes, cabbage and pork! Eet ees a pity you did not sooner arrive!"

"Master Tomkins did himself proud," remarked John Condit with a quiet smile.

"But why did ye not invite His Excellency to stop at our house, John?" asked Mehitable quickly and reproachfully.

"Nay, it be too much to ask o' any housewife, save in necessity," General Washington answered for John. "We might have gone on to the Widow Ball, whom I call my cousin," he added. "But 'twas better so. Master Tomkins was ready and able to serve us! But come, my child, an ye wish to ride wi' your brother, ye had best mount, for we start!"

"Is General Washington related to the Widow Ball, John—truly?" exclaimed Mehitable as, riding double, they trotted after the other horsemen. "Think o' one o' our *own neighbors* being his cousin!"

John laughed at the awe in her voice. "He calls her cousin—meeting her and comparing notes wi' her, they think themselves second cousins by marriage through his mother, Mary Ball, and her husband, Timothy Ball," he explained.

"'Tis strange Mary Ball hath not told me aught," remarked Mehitable. "I would ha' spread the news had he been *my* cousin!"

"Nay, not so!" returned Doctor Condit unsmilingly. "Any more than Mary hath done, for His Excellency's visits there, as everywhere about this Tory-infested country, have been more or less secret! 'Twould be a fine feather in a red-coat's cap to capture him, and rather hard," the young man finished ironically, "upon the Continental Army."

"True!" Mehitable nodded absently.

"But come, Hitty," her brother twisted himself in his saddle to peer into her face, "tell me why art walking?"

Mehitable explained her horse's lameness, and then, gazing over his shoulder at the Frenchman, La Fayette, who was riding directly ahead of them, she uttered a concerned exclamation.

"Why, John, what be the matter with that man?"

"General La Fayette?" He looked at the young Frenchman and suddenly, it seemed to him, too, that the other was riding doubled up in his saddle. John touched his spurs to his horse, and, drawing abreast the young man on the narrow road, asked what was the matter.

La Fayette turned a pallid face toward him. "M'sieu," he groaned, "I fear I have been given the poison!"

"Nay!" answered Doctor Condit reassuringly. "Who would want to poison ye, sir?"

"I have been given the poison, nevertheless!" insisted the Frenchman bitterly.

General Washington's attention now attracted, he turned and rode back to the others, while the rest of his aides immediately drew rein. He also, when informed by Doctor Condit what had happened, shook his head in disbelief at the sick man's conclusion.

"But let us stop here at this house and rest," he suggested kindly.

Mehitable, glancing up, was delighted to find that they had reached her own home. She slipped off from John's horse and flew up the snowy garden path.

"Mother! Cherry! Here be His Excellency!" She burst into the kitchen, startling the quiet family group around the supper table into smiling confusion.

Doctor Condit, supporting La Fayette upon his arm, entered at that moment, followed closely by General Washington.

"Rest here, sir!" commanded Mistress Condit, spreading a blanket upon the settle for the sufferer and "blazing" the fire in her capable way. "I will ha' a cup o' hot water for him, John, as soon as e'er it boils!"

In a moment or so, then, the young Frenchman

was sipping the hot water, exclaiming, between groans, upon his hostess's kindness. Half an hour passed, then General La Fayette got to his feet and weakly saluted his chief.

"I have made ze recovery!" he announced. "It was but the indigestion—ees that what you say, madam?—aftair all." He looked around the group of smiling, friendly faces and his eyes met Mehitable's whimsically. "I was not given ze poison! I send my apologies to ze good host!" And he blew lightly upon his fingers and waved them in the direction of Freemantown and Master Ned Tomkins.

CHAPTER XV

AN UNCONSCIOUS BETRAYAL

"ZOUNDS!" exclaimed Mehitable in bitter disappointment. "They be not home, Cherry! And I will not go swimming in the pond an Mistress Wright be not here to keep watch for us!"

She sighed and pushed her sunbonnet back on to her neck. Charity, seated upon the pillion behind her on old Dulcie, sighed, too. All the way across the Valley they had been anticipating their cool bath beneath the willows.

"Well, let us return home," Charity was commencing, when the other interrupted her.

"Cherry, there is a letter 'R' on their gatepost!"

Both girls stared, then looked at each other in alarm. "Think ye Moody is out?" exclaimed Mehitable uneasily. "'Tis plain that is why the poor Wrights have fled! Doubtless they are gone to hide on the Mountain!"

"Moody!" answered Charity. "Nay, not a stick would have been left standing, nor a stone, had Moody been here!"

James Moody, a peaceable enough man before

the war, had been goaded by foolish neighbors into bitter Toryism, so that much of New Jersey had suffered from his anger. He had joined the loyal troops in New Jersey, had even attempted to capture, though unsuccessfully, Governor Livingston, so that wherever special pillage and destruction and cruelty had been done, his name was upon the lips of his victims.

"Ye be right," agreed Mehitable now. "But mayhap he will come!"

Charity gave a startled glance down the road, then shook her head. "Not until night, Hitty, I feel sure. Ever he seems to time his raids then!"

They slipped off from their horse with one accord, and approached the gatepost. Yes, there, unmistakably, was the letter "R" for rebel with which the British who came over into New Jersey were wont to mark their victims. As she glanced away, however, Charity caught sight of a gander near by.

"Look, Hitty, there be one o' Mistress Wright's precious geese!" She gestured toward it laughingly. "Hast ever seen him before without the other seventeen?"

Mehitable, glancing at it carelessly, suddenly looked more intently.

"Why, what has he upon his leg, Cherry? Something be around that old gander's leg, I vow! Let's catch him and see!"

At once there commenced a wild chase around

Mistress Wright's dooryard. Finally, the indignant fowl was cornered beside the kitchen step, both girls so intent upon spreading wide their skirts and approaching him with wary caution that, when a voice spoke behind them, they jumped nervously.

"Eh! And is this hoo ye treat my gander!" Mistress Wright and her husband, who had arrived unperceived, stood looking at them. The two girls regarded them in return rather sheepishly.

"Where have ye been, dear Mistress Wright?" asked Mehitable hastily. "I thought ye must have gone to Cranetown!"

"Cranetown!" exclaimed the old lady. "Noo, John, do'ee carry in summat oor gudes afore yo' sit!" She turned imploringly to her old husband, who had been about to seat himself upon the doorstep. With a sigh and a groan, he got up and shuffled out to the farm cart which the girls saw, now, was piled high with household goods. "I will gae in and see hoo the house has fared!" She disappeared within the house.

"Mither has been fair distracted wi' the raid!" explained Master Wright, returning with various boxes and bundles from the cart.

"Raid!" Both girls stared at him open-mouthed.

"Aye!" The old man looked at them curiously. "Was not your house marked, then?"

The girls shook their heads.

"We received word yesterday morn, 'Moody is out!'" went on the old man slowly. "It did not take us lang to pack oor wee bit o' goods and gae! Mither set her geese free, hopin' they wad stray! I see only the gander, though, so I fear t'others be missin'! Mither," he addressed his old wife, who came out the door just then, "see aught o' yer geese?"

He did not offer to search for them as, immediately worried, the old lady shaded her eyes with her hand and looked around. As she stepped into the yard, she glanced at his nonchalant attitude.

"I was jes' sae pleased, John—nothin's been touched in the house. All that's missin' be your paintin' f'r the Horse's Neck Tavern!" she said innocently.

Old Master Wright, who had remained entirely complacent at his wife's loss, darted into the house. "Nay—my paintin'! My bonnie paintin'! Woe is me!" The girls heard him wail.

"It do make a wee bit o' difference whose the loss be around here," observed his wife unsympathetically. "He cared nowt aboot ma geese! What"—she stopped and stared at the gander, who had ventured near her at that moment—"what be that around the fowl's leg?"

Mehitable giggled. "We were about to find out when you came, Mistress Wright," she ex-

plained demurely. "That is why we were cornering him!"

"Weel, let us see, oursel's!" cried the old lady. Then, while her husband searched high and low for his painting, in the house, she pursued her gander around and around outside. At last, after ten or more minutes of strenuous exercise in the blazing June sunshine that left them gasping and warm, they succeeded in once more cornering the gander, and Mehitable, weak and breathless from laughter, tore a paper from his leg which had been around it like an anklet.

"Why, 'tis a poem, I vow!" She spread it open and studied it interestedly.

"Nay," the old lady spoke in a peremptory tone, "let us awa' into oor cool house. 'Twill be better, there; and Feyther do be a bonnie reader," she finished pointedly.

Rather taken aback, Mehitable meekly handed the paper to old Master Wright, upon entering the kitchen, and subsided into a corner. Charity sent her a laughing glance, and then they settled down to listen as the old man read aloud in a singsong voice:

"Dear Mistress Wright
We bid you good-night
'Tis time for us soldiers to wander

We've paid for your geese
A penny apiece
And left the change with the gander.
Signed, COLONEL ROSS and SOLDIERS."

For a moment there was silence in the big kitchen then the old couple spoke together.

"Why, hoo did the mon know oor name?" That was Master Wright.

"Where be the change he did write aboot?" That was Mistress Wright.

Together they scurried out the door, the girls following. Master Wright forgot his sorrow over his missing sign as he ducked and ran after the elusive gander, who, becoming wise from experience, exhibited surprising powers of evasion. But Master Wright grew wise from experience, too, and at last the gander was flapping wildly beneath his arm. Feeling over the plump, feathered body, the old gentleman drew out a piece of cloth tied beneath the wing and this, when opened, displayed some jingling coins.

"Seventeen!" said Master Wright triumphantly. "Weel, Mither!"

Mistress Wright picked the coins up and carried them into the house. When the others had followed, she looked around at them innocently from her armchair.

"I ha' put it awa'—the money!" she said.

"Mayhap oor descendants will wish to know an the red-coats were allus cruel. This paper and the money will tell a different tale—though Heaven knows," she cast her eyes up piously, "the British need all these tales they can get! And at least, Feyther"—she looked at her old husband mischievously—"I received more for ma' loss than yo' did for yours. And it had been winter, I'd ha' said the red-coats used the paintin' for firewood!"

"Woman!" Her husband spoke sternly. Then his eyes commenced to twinkle. "Woman, ye allus be richt!" he said mildly. "That be the worst of it. But I do think they learned oor name was Wright from the name I put on ma paintin'."

At the door, waving good-bye to the two girls, Mistress Wright looked up anxiously at the sky. No longer did the June sunshine spread over the scene. While they had been drinking buttermilk in the old kitchen, an enormous black cloud had crept from the west, drifting, drifting, until now a weird purple-gray light enveloped sky and land alike.

"Feyther, hast forgot the things out in yon cart?" she scolded. "Hitty," she screamed, "think yo' better not return?"

Mehitable, out of hearing, smiled and waved her hand unheedingly, and leaping into the saddle before Charity, they trotted off. Mistress Wright, watching them anxiously, saw Charity tilt her head

backward to glance into the sky and speak to her sister; but Mehitable shook her head violently, and in another moment, they were out of sight beyond a bend in the lane.

Master Wright had no sooner carried in his household goods than, with the tropic violence of extreme weather, the heavens seemed to open, and straightway he was drenched to the skin, so that his old wife, as though he had been out in the rain for his own pleasure, scolded him vigorously when he came into her kitchen.

Mehitable, meanwhile, was lashing poor old Dulcie to a gallop.

"Let us go back to Master Wright's!" shrieked Charity in her ear.

"Nay!" The other shook her head stubbornly. "We have come too far. We be near that old cabin that Granny Ward lived in, Cherry. I have been watching for it through this terrible rain."

And a moment or so later they did indeed come upon the cabin, standing vacant and forlorn beside the edge of the woodland. Dismounting, they both ran for the low opening, Mehitable pulling the horse after her.

The cabin was a single room with a dirt floor. A big fireplace stood at one end, and directly over their heads, as they entered, was a half-loft, open to the room. Old Dulcie had to be pulled in through the low door and beneath the loft out into

the center of the cabin, where she stood gazing around her with surprised eyes and erected ears. Mehitable, shaking herself like a wet terrier, glanced at the horse and burst into laughter.

"She is not used to being invited into milady's chamber, forsooth!" she cried. Sobering, she glanced at Charity through the dense gloom. "Didst know General Washington hath often visited the Widow Ball on the ridge road to Millburn and concealed his horse in her kitchen because o' passing Tories?" she asked abruptly. "John told me o't when he was home and when Mother next sent me upon an errand to Mistress Ball's, I looked in the corner o' her kitchen as ye enter, by the fireplace, ye mind——"

"Oh, Hitty, what did ye see?" asked Charity breathlessly. She shrank back as a flare of lightning illuminated the dingy place. "What did ye see?"

"I saw where His Excellency's horse had chewed off the inside window ledge!" said Mehitable, bursting into a laugh.

"Nay, it is an honor, I think, to have so famous a man's horse chew one's window sill!" said Charity with dignity. Her tone changed. "Think you he will come there this summer?" she inquired eagerly.

"Nay—hush!" Mehitable leaned toward her. "General Washington hath left Morris Town—on

June seventh, he was at the Short Hills, awaiting results o' the battle—skirmishes at Springfield, John told me."

"The day poor Mistress Caldwell, wife o' Pastor Caldwell, was murdered in her home at Connecticut Farms," said Charity, wide-eyed.

"Aye." Mehitable nodded her head. "Oh, how dark it be, Cherry—just like night."

The next instant she uttered a scream, for a figure leaped down from the open loft and, landing lightly upon his feet, swept Mehitable a ceremonious bow.

"We meet in strange places, forsooth!" said the spy, Simpson. "And I thank ye for the information ye have given me so kindly." He bowed again mockingly and was gone.

For a long moment, neither girl moved. Then, the air seemed to turn to a sizzling yellow, the earth seemed to rock, and while old Dulcie neighed in uneasy fear, the two sisters clutched each other.

"The lightning!" screamed Charity, in a panic. "The lightning hath struck in the woods near here! I like not to be under these big trees! 'Tis safer in the open! Let me out, Hitty—I be going!"

Mehitable tried in vain to stay her; but Charity was now beyond reasoning with. She flew out the door and up the streaming lane, so that the older girl was forced to follow with their horse. Catching up to the sobbing, hysterical figure, Mehitable

made her mount and did so herself. They galloped toward home. Gallop as they might, however, they could not escape the storm.

"I am going to seek shelter at Munn's tavern!" declared Mehitable, when they had turned into the First Road and were headed toward the Mountain.

"Nay, that spy might be there!" shuddered Charity. "Let us be on our way, Hitty! I'd rather far risk the rain than his shifty ways!"

"But we must get in somewhere out o' the rain, Cherry!" answered Mehitable desperately. "See how ye do shiver! An ye get sick o' chills and fever, Mother will ne'er forgive me!"

"Let us go into the meeting house!" suggested Charity, all of a sudden, spying the plain stone structure, built lengthwise to the road, ahead of them.

Mehitable, in silent answer when they reached the church building, drew rein, and slipping out of her saddle, sped across the wet grass to try the heavy door. To her intense disappointment, it was locked. She fled along the front of the building, trying each of the two windows to the right of the entrance. Rounding the corner, she tried two more windows, and finally reached another door. This was unlocked and yielded beneath her eager fingers. Returning to Charity, who was sitting with bent head beneath the terrific downpour of rain, Mehitable directed her to go into the church.

"I will lead Dulcie around to the little grove in back. There, she will be concealed from the road, as well as partially sheltered," added Mehitable.

Entering the shadowy church a little later, she peered around and saw no sign of Charity. "Cherry!" she called softly. "Where are ye!"

"Here I be!" came back Charity's voice, echoing and reëchoing in the big bare room.

"Nay, I see ye not!" Mehitable's tone grew impatient, though she felt strange, almost sacrilegious, in using the meeting house even as a place of refuge.

Only a suppressed giggle answering her, she looked around her. She saw the plain pulpit, with its old desk taken from the old church which had been razed when this second one had been built. Above the pulpit, with its uncomfortable wooden bench placed against the wall for the minister and his assistants, were four wooden pegs for their hats. The pews flanking the pulpit right and left were reserved for the church officials. The rest of the pews were all alike, except that the women sat alone on one side of the church, while the men sat together on the other side, with the unmarried, younger element of the congregation segregated in the same way in the balconies, where a tithing-man watched over the boys. All was quiet to-day. No sign, even, of Charity until—Mehitable's eyes dropped to the level of the pew directly before her as she stood in one of the end aisles and met her

sister's mischievous ones staring at her over the pew door.

"Come ye into Mistress Baldwin's pew," invited Charity laughingly. "She has left a most comfortable pillow on her bench!"

Mehitable opened the door of the little boxlike arrangement and, closing it after her, sank down beside Charity.

"Nice and warm in here," she answered drowsily, refusing the pillow unselfish Charity tried to force her to accept. "The heat must have remained from last Sunday when it was so warm. Our things ought not to take long to dry, Cherry. And just hear the rain on the roof! 'Tis like a hundred cannon, I vow!"

"And how dark it is!" exclaimed Charity, in a wondering tone. "Why, 'tis just like night, now, Hitty, and——"

Charity's voice died away as she turned her head to listen. "There be someone at the door, Hitty!" she whispered then.

Mehitable shook her head violently and ducked to the floor, motioning her sister to do likewise. They were just in time, for no sooner had they concealed themselves than the door through which they, themselves, had obtained admittance, opened and creaking boots stamped along the aisle off which their pew opened. The boots seemed to stop, to the girls' dismay, directly in front of their

pew. Then, as they knelt with bated breath, they heard the opposite pew door open and close.

"Well, Hawtree," said a cheerful voice, "this be saintly shelter from the storm, yet 'twill serve our purpose as well as any!"

Charity grasped Mehitable's arm. The voice was that of the spy, Simpson!

"Saintly shelter, indeed!" responded Hawtree surlily. "And because o' the storm—Gad, that be a close one!—it must do for us!"

There were sounds of wet garments being spread out to dry upon the wooden bench, then Simpson spoke briskly:

"And now to business, gentlemen!"

"Nay!" interrupted a third voice gruffly. "Let us first assure ourselves, young man, that we be the only occupants in here! The door was unlatched, ye mind!"

"An it make it any easier in your mind, Moody!" answered Hawtree scornfully.

"Back here beneath the bench, Cherry—quick!" whispered Mehitable, noiselessly, as footsteps scattering over the church indicated that a search had begun.

"No one here!" reported Simpson's voice from the front of the church after awhile.

"No one on this side!" came Moody's voice from the opposite side of the big room.

Clump! Clump! Clump! Charity's eyes di-

lated in silent horror as a heavy tread came down the aisle toward her pew. A pause. Hawtree was stopping to glance in the pew ahead. Clump! Clump! Another pause. Through the black storm shadows there came to the sisters an impression of a peering face, the vague gesture of an outstretched hand feeling along the bench above their heads, a heavy breath—then, clump! the footsteps moved on and the frightened girls clasped each other's hands in spasmodic relief.

"No one here!" they presently heard Hawtree announce sullenly, his search over, too. Followed sounds of the three men settling themselves.

A half hour passed slowly, tortuously. Mehitable's body grew cramped, so that all of her being seemed to dissolve into an aching, agonizing desire to move. When she became numbed, it was better. But she dared not move. Charity, smaller than her sister, was not so limited as to space, and therefore was not so uncomfortable as she; but even she was glad when, at the end of the half hour, the men rose noisily and left the church.

The two girls crawled out of their hiding place, when they had made sure the unwelcome visitors were not returning.

"What are ye going to do, Hitty?" asked Charity, as they stood groaningly trying to straighten their backs. Knowing Mehitable, the little sister had not the least doubt in the world that, having

acquired a vast amount of information concerning the enemy's plans, she would do *something!*

"I shall ride to warn our militia!" Mehitable's eyes flashed. "Ouch, my back! I vow 'tis broken. There be the signal gun at the Short Hills, Cherry —they call it Old Sow because it is placed on the Sow's Back—that ridge that can be seen both Morris Town way and Springfield and Elizabeth Town way! I shall ride to warn the countryside! Mayhap I will have a chance to help my poor country after so betraying her to Simpson—though Heaven knows I did not mean to! They expect to go right through our lines at Springfield, do they?—those hateful Skinner's 'Greens' and those despicable Hessians under General Knypehausen! Well, we shall see how farmers fight when they wish to avenge a New Jersey woman's murder! Mayhap poor Mistress Caldwell did not die in vain, after all!"

CHAPTER XVI

A RIDE FOR LIBERTY

MEHITABLE was off through the murky, storm-threatened twilight. Shreds of lightning beyond the Mountain showed that thunder heads still existed there, that the storm had not yet passed on over Newark and Bergen Heights to its usual destination, the Hudson Valley.

She had left Charity at the Condit gate, had dug her slipper heels into Dulcie's sides, and now she was slowing down before the Briggs's house, deserted since the Tory, Elijah Briggs, had been sent to Staten Island by order of the government. The Briggs's farmhouse was at the junction of the Second Road, which followed the foot of the Mountain across the Orange Valley, and Fifth Road, which dwindled as it ascended steeply up the side of the Mountain into a mere narrow Indian trail. Mehitable debated the question briefly—should she ride straight over the hills to the Short Hills road or should she follow the more traveled road to Millburn and so to the Sow's Back? Presently, she shook her head.

"The longest way be the shortest," she mur-

mured into her horse's intelligent ears. "On, Dulcie!"

So they held to the way which, leading south and then west, would take them around the foot of Orange Mountain.

On and on they flew. Up the turn of the lane as it led to the ridge road on which was situated the Widow Ball's house. As she flashed past it, she looked at its lighted windows with a smile upon her face. She had very pleasant memories of the large family who had grown up within its walls—memories she had formed when a tiny girl taken a-visiting there by her mother to be petted and caressed by the larger boys and girls. Now, these same boys and girls were grown men and women, though Mistress Ball was more than proud of her three sons, John, thirty-three, Uzal, thirty-one, and David, her baby, twenty-three, who were fighting valiantly with other New Jersey men.

Galloping on, there came a flash of lightning, a low, threatening rumble of thunder. Glancing back nervously, Mehitable suddenly started. Was that someone following her on horseback there, just appearing over the edge of the ridge? Another glare of lightning blinded her, as she gazed, and when she looked back again, the figure had disappeared into the shadows, if it had existed at all, and pursuing hoof-beats, if there were any, were drowned in Dulcie's hoof-beats.

On and on. Past stretches of forest, rising not so abruptly now as the road led away a little from the mountain-foot. Past scattered farmhouses. Past more forest. On and on.

"No more hills, Dulcie!" Mehitable promised the old horse, lying along her neck and speaking encouragingly into the cocked ear. "Just a tiny short one at the very end o' your trip!"

But Dulcie was commencing to limp! Mehitable, glancing frantically over her shoulder, saw at that moment, too, when there came a convenient flash of lightning, that someone *was* following! She felt her heart turn to lead. Who could it be? She searched her mind, having dismissed Simpson and Hawtree and Moody as not being likely to travel in that direction. Who could it be? Dulcie's hoof-beats made it into an annoying rhythm —who—could—it—be? One by one she dismissed the names of Tory neighbors and confessed herself at last to be totally puzzled. But whoever it was, she told herself grimly, she would ride to the bitter end rather than surrender before Dulcie was down and out entirely!

"Tush!" she tried to reassure herself. "Art becoming silly!"

But glancing back an instant later, she saw, as the lightning came again, that the distance between the mysterious rider and herself was decreasing by reason of Dulcie's misfortune. It could only be

a matter of time before she would be overtaken. Mehitable uttered a little sob. Was she not to have her chance to help the country she had not meant to betray? she asked herself forlornly.

It was raining now. A great drop spattered upon her hand, another upon her bared head from which the sunbonnet had been discarded long ago. Then came a swift downpour, and the road turned to a sea of mud beneath Dulcie's feet, a sea both treacherous and dangerous in its bog holes.

It was not Dulcie who found it so, however. As she glanced back, with the green lightning flare, she saw the pursuer's horse go down, and at the next flash, the rider was up on his feet again, but not the beast.

"The animal hath broken his leg!" she murmured to Dulcie, who pricked her ears rebukingly. "Ah, I beg your pardon!" The girl patted her steed's neck whimsically. "I did forget it might be a friend o' yours, my dear!"

So, freed from the fear of pursuit, Mehitable galloped through the quiet village of Millburn. There, supper over long ago, bedtime candles were beginning to twinkle through house windows.

As suddenly then as it had commenced the rain stopped. To the north of the bridle path she was following through the forest Mehitable could see the end of the Mountain with its lookout and its cliffs, when the lightning would allow her and the

forest opened to permit her. A farmhouse up a side lane showed yellow blots for windows, too.

"General Washington's headquarters at the Short Hills, I believe!" speculated the girl. Afterward she found her surmises to have been true.

At last they swung into the more traveled road leading straight to Morris Town, and there Mehitable headed west for a time.

"On, Dulcie, on!" came her monotonous cry, and the old horse responded gamely. "Poor lass!" Mehitable's throat ached at the awful limp the animal was displaying. "Poor lass, ye must be in pain! Amos will ne'er forgive me for this trip!"

They were ascending a rise of the road when Mehitable, peering sharply and watchfully to her left, suddenly pulled sharply in that direction and Dulcie bolted into a woodland trail leading to the ridge that was their destination. But suddenly there came a shout.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"A messenger!" cried the girl, drawing rein.

"Advance, messenger, and give the countersign!" The sentry's voice came to her through profound darkness now, for the lightning had ceased.

"How can I when I don't know it!" retorted Mehitable impatiently. "Let me pass to see your officer in charge!"

"Nay!" The answer came sternly.

"Fool!" Mehitable fidgeted in her saddle. Her impatience grew. "We are wasting valuable time, I tell ye—nay, I will go ahead!"

"Halt!" Again came the command; but Mehitable was riding down the sentry. As he leaped out of the way, there came the flash of his musket, the singing of a bullet, and Mehitable felt her horse quiver beneath her knees. Then poor Dulcie sank to the ground, rolled in agony. Mehitable was thrown clear of the beast and staggered to her feet. She and the sentry met over Dulcie's now motionless body.

"Fool!" said Mehitable furiously. "Fool!" Her voice changed. She sank upon the horse lying quiet between them. "Oh, you have killed her! You have killed my old Dulcie! Why, she—she—be *dead!*"

"Hitty Condit!" The sentry bent unbelievingly over her.

Mehitable dashed the bitter tears from her eyes and looked up. "Why, Young Cy!" she began. Her face worked. "Oh, Young Cy—how could ye! How could ye!"

"But, Hitty—you—I——" Young Cy stammered helplessly and relapsed into aching silence. How could he explain to Mehitable that he had merely done his duty? But presently the girl looked up.

"It was my fault, Young Cy! I—I—killed poor

Dulcie! I had no right to ride past ye without the countersign!" she said quietly. "But come" —her voice changed—"now that ye know who I am, lead me to your officer. I have important news!"

It was not long, then, after the girl and the lad had entered the officer's hut, that the cannon given by General Washington for that purpose barked out its warning to the New Jersey countryside. Soon, too, great beacons, ready piled, blazed their message to the militia far and near.

Mehitable could see the scenes that were taking place in almost every home. The men leaping to arms, hurrying forth into the night with wives and children fetching their powder horns, their hats, their coats; the men reporting to their respective captains; the men, gathered together, marching to the point of battalion or regimental mobilization. She stood with clasped hands a little distance away from the cannon, gazing from the Sow's Back across distant valleys, and gloried in the answering beacon fires which sprang out against the darkness of the world, reassuring, magnificent.

"To arms! To arms!" thundered Old Sow.

"To arms! To arms!" came the echoes.

"*We have armed! We have armed!*" signalled the beacon fires.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WEDDING GUEST

FORSOOTH, nothing nice ever happens at our place any more!" complained Mehitable fretfully, pushing forward her sunbonnet to shade her eyes as she peered down through the blinding sunshine at Charity.

The younger girl, squatting back upon her heels and shaded by the tall corn stalks growing all about her, looked up with a smile.

"What d'ye want to happen?" she asked lazily.

"Oh, anything, Cherry!" Mehitable's tone was impatient. "Isn't that stuff almost ready to pour? Suz, it be hot out here in this field!"

Charity bent over the melting lead which, in a pot suspended from three iron rods, was being made ready for the bullet molds. She was trying to smother and spread the smoke from the fire and, of the two girls, had the most right to be short-tempered, for her task was not a pleasant one. As soon as she attempted to direct the smoke, the fire smoldered angrily and threatened to go out. Yet she did not dare to let its telltale signal rise from

the cornfield. The women of those days chose cornfields as splendid places to make bullets, for the tall stalks hid them, and they were not apt to be surprised by the British, as they might have been in their kitchens.

"But, Hitty, since the war started, it has been nice *not* to have anything happen, for so much of it has been most unpleasant!" Charity reminded her gently. "Besides, it has not been overly many weeks that ye were in the midst o' excitement at Springfield!"

Mehitable stood, slender and tall, in the sunshine. "Oh, that was most glorious!" she cried. "We could almost see from the Sow's Back—see our men drive back the enemy, and as for hearing —why, the Widow Ball told me later that she sat in her kitchen doorway and listened to the noise o' battle all day long, it only dying away toward sunset! And she be away over this way, miles from Springfield! Then, toward sunset, home came our men, limping, wounded, but triumphant." She looked down suddenly at the younger girl who, in turn, was staring up at her, entranced. "Cherry, I would not live i' any other time but this an I could!" she ended solemnly.

Charity, moved in spite of herself by her sister's ringing words, fell to her task of trying to smother the smoke once more. "I don't know, Hitty," she said presently, in a low tone, "I am tired o't! I

like not noise o' battles and wounded men limping home!"

"But suppose they did not limp home!" said Mehitable with a laugh. "Suppose they came not at all! Ye would like that less, I'll warrant. Mistress Ball was glad enow to have her three sons return to her, limping or otherwise!"

"Nay, Hitty, I meant not that—I—I——" stammered Charity, conscience-stricken. "Ye know I did not——"

"I know ye are a dear, silly goose," interrupted Mehitable, "and that the lead be ready to ladle into the molds!"

And the two fell to their wartime task. After all the lead had been used, they stamped out part of the fire, threw earth over the rest of it, and pushed the molds containing the cooling bullets back among the thick-growing corn stalks, out of sight. Then, chatting and laughing, they sauntered slowly back to the Condit farmhouse.

Rounding a corner of the building, however, they stopped and stared. Hitched to a walnut tree beside the road were two horses, and company was rare on that country road.

"It looks like John's horse!" exclaimed Mehitable, hurrying her steps.

"Aye, it be John's horse!" echoed Charity happily.

They entered the kitchen in breathless haste,

though they had to stop and blink upon the threshold from that blindness which follows exposure to overbright sunshine and entrance into a darkened room. But as her blurring vision cleared Mehitable sprang forward.

"Nancy! Nancy!" she cried and was locked in the arms of John Condit's betrothed.

"Here, here, Hitty," broke in his voice laughingly, "save some o' the hugs for me, lass!"

"But it—it—has been so long since we saw ye, Nancy!" stammered Mehitable, giving her brother a brief peck upon his cheek and turning back delightedly to the pretty lady who, smiling and blushing, was lovingly greeting Charity. "How long are ye going to stay this time?"

For answer, John Condit and his mother, who was beaming from her chair near by, exchanged happy glances. Then John looked meaningly at Mistress Livingston. "Tell her, Nancy!" he commanded gently.

Mistress Nancy looked up, looked down, blushed, and finally threw her arms again around Mehitable. "I be going to stay for ever this time!" she whispered softly.

"For ever!" Mehitable stared. "Will—will your father and mother let ye?"

"Aye." Mistress Nancy's eyes met those of the tall officer who was looking at her over his mother's chair. "You see, there is to be a wedding here

this morrow," she said innocently. "At least, so I've heard!"

"A wedding!" Mehitable looked more and more bewildered. Afterward, she never would admit her stupidity, blandly stating in the face of all the witnesses that she had only been seeing if she could fool them! "Whose wedding, Nancy?" She looked blankly from one smiling face to the other.

"Oh, wake up, Hitty!" Doctor Condit snapped his fingers at her good-naturedly. "Mother, ye never let Hitty fall on her head when a babe to make her a little daft, now, did ye?" he asked, in feigned anxiety, turning to Mistress Condit. At that lady's laughing denial, he looked again at Mehitable.

"But—but——" The girl stood looking at them wildly.

"Ye feel a little better, now, don't ye, Hitty?" Her brother hurried to her side in pretended concern and held her pulse. "Quite normal," he said then, to the others' chorus of mirth. "Let's see your tongue, Hitty!"

But sticking it out at him saucily, Mehitable fled to her mother's chair and faced that lady excitedly. "Mother, is it true Nancy and John are to be married here this morrow?" she demanded. "I can get no sense from either one o' them."

Charity, coming up behind Mehitable, stared

wide-eyed as she waited for their mother's answer. When Mistress Condit nodded and smiled, both girls uttered a shriek of joy, and, catching each other by the hands, spun around and around the big kitchen.

"But, Nancy, won't your father and mother feel badly not to be at your wedding?" Mehitable presently stopped her mad whirling to ask this, with her usual lack of tact.

Mistress Nancy turned from the window where she was conversing with Squire Condit, who had entered during the confusion. Her eyes darkened and her lips quivered all at once.

"Aye," she nodded soberly. "But—but John dared not come to New York Town, for fear o' capture, and—and my mother could not come on horseback, not being well, so Father stayed home wi' her—and vehicles are not to be obtained for New Jersey trips so—so——" The sweet voice thickened, choked, died away into silence.

"So we are to be married the morrow!" finished John tenderly, coming up to clasp his sweetheart in his arms. "And some people," he remarked pointedly, "do not exhibit the consideration they might display an they choose."

"Nay!" Mistress Nancy, drying the tears in her eyes, perceived the hurt ones in Mehitable's. "Nay!" The little bride-to-be ran across to the other girl. "Do not mind him, forsooth! He only

assumes airs thus to impress us all! But I do not fear him, though he does scold! See!" She flew back, and while Charity and her mother watched laughingly, she stood a-tiptoe and pulled her lover's nose until he held up his hands in hasty surrender. Then she swaggered gaily back to Mehitable. "I am not afraid o' the man!" she finished. "Now, come, kiss and make up, both o' ye! I was only silly and tired, else I should never ha' felt hurt. And he shall scold ye no more, Hitty!" And pulling brother and sister toward each other, she made them kiss each other, and the little scene ended in laughter.

The next day dawned as lovely as any bride could wish.

"Don't be late for church!" said everyone, rushing around in confusion. And of the ones who said it the most often and the most seriously, Mehitable was that person.

"Mother, where be my silken shirt?" That was Squire Condit's voice shouting down the stairs.

"Oh, Mother—Ram's horn! Someone hath hidden the boot-jack!" That was John's voice, impatient, nervous.

"Moth-er! Don't pick the white roses—I wish to gather them last—they wilt so quickly!" Charity was to see to the arrangement of the nosegays.

"Mother, I vow someone has sat upon this bonnet! It never had this shape before!" Mehitable

entered the Condit kitchen abruptly. "How does my gown look?"

Mistress Condit turned a perspiring face toward her daughter. She had been up long before dawn, preparing the wedding feast and performing the thousand and one endless tasks that only the mother of the family thinks she must do at such times.

"Your bonnet looks very well—of course no one sat on it!—and so does your gown, Hitty!" she gasped. "Go tell Cherry to keep still—she drives me fair distracted! I won't pick her roses—I ha' no time, tell her! Call up to your father and tell him his silken shirt do be in the highboy, second drawer! And take the boot-jack to John before he shouts us all out o' the house! Mercy, Nancy be the only quiet one beneath this roof! No!" Mistress Condit shook her head as she turned back to lift a furiously boiling pot from the crane and swung another into its place in the fire cavern. "Ye can do naught here, Hitty! I want to get everything ready before we start for church, then we can cool off this room and reheat the food outdoors. Art going out?" She looked up sharply as, her errands done, Mehitable stepped toward the door. "Then tell Amos to watch that roasting-pig he be barbecuing! I'll ne'er forgive him an he lets it burn!"

"Amos does not speak to me," answered Mehitable, a shadow falling over her bright face. "He

hath ne'er forgiven me the death o' poor Dulcie!"

"Eh!" Mistress Condit glanced at her absently. "Oh, nonsense, he will get o'er that!" she said comfortably. "Don't go far—do not be late for church, Hitty!"

"As though I would be—my first wedding!" answered Mehitable scornfully. "Besides, please notice that I be the only one ready and dressed, wi' the rest all still adorning themselves!"

She walked out slowly through the shady orchard, where Amos sat beside the trench he had dug. Within the trench, smoking and succulent, the wedding meats were being prepared. But Amos neither answered nor looked up when she stopped to give him her mother's message, and, sighing, Mehitable walked on to the great barn.

Entering the saddle room, from which a ladder led up into the hayloft above, she glanced down dubiously at her best gown. She wanted most intensely to go up into the sweet-smelling hay and there be alone to think over the great event, and wanting to do a thing with Mehitable was almost invariably to do it. Amos, therefore, coming into the barn a second or so later, was not surprised to see a flutter of the best gown disappearing over the top of the ladder into the haymow.

Settling herself upon the fragrant hay, Mehitable sank into luxurious reverie . . . dark eyes . . . cocked hat . . . tall, slender figure

. . . a buff and blue uniform . . . Aaron Harrison's face when she had told him the pitiful "No." . . . All these became inexplicably mixed up. . . . Then there was Jemima's baby . . . and Nancy's wedding-morn smile. . . . A little time passed . . . a little more time passed . . . and presently Mehitable became aware of eyes, watching eyes . . . and opened her own.

"Gray Hawk!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet.

The Indian bent his head in stately salutation and moved forward from where he had been standing by the top of the ladder, watching her with folded arms.

"Come danger!" he announced in his guttural voice.

"Danger?" For almost the first time since she had known his relationship to her brother, Mehitable looked skeptical. She glanced around the big, dim, sweet-smelling place. "Danger?" she repeated. "*Here*, Gray Hawk? Nay, what could happen i' the security o' my father's barn?"

"One night I ride!" said the Indian, changing the subject abruptly. "Horse fall—break leg!"

"Ye mean," Mehitable stared at him with knitted brows, "ye mean—that night before the battle o' Springfield—oh, Gray Hawk, was it ye following me?"

"Ugh-huh!" grunted the Indian, nodding. He gave a fatalistic shrug. "No good—horse break leg," he added.

"Oh, me!" Mehitable sighed. "An ye had caught up wi' me—though I should ha' been frightened daft—poor Dulcie might ha' been alive now!"

The Indian moved impatiently. "Danger!" he said again sharply.

"But, Gray Hawk, an there be," Mehitable made a puzzled gesture, "can ye tell me *where?*"

"Here!" said a new voice. And both Indian and maid whirled around to find Simpson standing at one end of the hayloft, where he had evidently just emerged from a snug, hidden nest in the hay, standing with his arms nonchalantly crossed and a pistol in each hand. Over his shoulder peered Hawtree.

"Come," said Simpson, a malicious smile upon his face at their surprise, "line up where we can see ye—you and yonder redskin, mistress!"

But not for nothing had Mehitable told Charity she loved living in this wartime period. Her whole soul thrilled to meet the present, full of danger as it was. She uttered a shriek of defiance and sprang toward the ladder hole; but Simpson, half laughing and not pulling his pistol-trigger, headed her off. Then she darted toward the low, wide door through which hay was tossed at harvest

time; but there Hawtree headed her off—perhaps happily, for she might have broken her neck had she jumped to the ground below.

"Amos! Amos!" The girl's despairing cry rang out, was answered from outside the barn.

"Help! Run for help!" Panting, her hand upon her heart, Mehitable backed against the wall and watched the rogue, Hawtree, closing in upon her.

"They be all at church, mistress!" Apparently Amos did not recognize the extreme stress in the girl's voice. His leisurely footsteps could be heard approaching the foot of the ladder. "What would ye?"

"Back, Amos! Nay, come not up here!" Mehitable threw every ounce she possessed of authority into her voice before it ended in a gurgle as Hawtree's hand closed over her mouth; but, struggling with all her healthy young strength, she heard the farm servant's retreating footsteps and felt oddly disappointed. He had gone, leaving her to her fate! All the years of service in her father's employment, even the gift of his freedom, for Amos had been a bond servant, indentured for many more years than Squire Condit had allowed him to give gratis—all this counted not at all! Mehitable, writhing, twisting in Hawtree's rough grasp, wondered dully if Amos were still angry with her, if he were showing her revenge now!

And now she cried out, for Hawtree had given her arm a cruel wrench. This was not to Simpson's liking.

"Nay, Hawtree, think ye be on a prison ship?" he said sternly. His eyes were fixed guardedly upon the Indian, who, arms folded haughtily, had stood immobile all this while; but he shook his head sharply. "Let the maid go free! She cannot escape now!"

Hawtree dropped Mehitable's arm and lounged sullenly away. "Get her down a-horseback, then!" he growled. "My turn shall come later!"

Simpson, his eyes still watching the Indian, bowed ironically. "Will ye descend, mistress? We must away!" he said with mock politeness.

"Nay!" Mehitable shook her head stubbornly and stiffened herself as she leaned against the wall. "I will not go one step until ye tell me what ye would do wi' us!"

"That be none o' your concern, mistress!" Simpson was commencing when Hawtree, with an oath, thrust himself back and once more seized Mehitable's arm.

"Ye will do what we bid!" he snapped brutally. "There be no ruse can help ye now, smart though ye think yourself, mistress!"

Then ensued a pretty struggle indeed between villain and maid! Mehitable's best gown was torn and ripped in a dozen places, yet did Hawtree pay

for these rents with an equal number of scratches. Her farm-bred strength made her no mean match, for Hawtree was flabby from easy living, and the girl, for all her slenderness, had the wiry activity and the courage of a tigress.

So the strange combat, with the silent Indian and Simpson guarding him, for witnesses, might have been prolonged indefinitely had not the latter, his glance shifting for the fraction of an instant to the open haymow door, taken a quick step forward toward the two swaying figures.

"Away, fool, before it be too late!" he cried to Hawtree.

But a sardonic grunt from the Indian mingled with one from below, and up the ladder hole came the words, "I fear it be already too late, gentlemen! Ye are our prisoners!"

And now the Indian proved himself also no mean antagonist. In the instant of confusion following these words he saw his chance and took it. There was the flash of a brown arm and Simpson's pistols were no longer in his grasp! One pistol was in Gray Hawk's hand, instead, and the other was lying on the floor in a far corner. Another flash of the brown arm and Simpson's hands were pinned behind his back and he was held, squirming helplessly, before the Indian.

"White man!" Gray Hawk's voice was quiet; but Hawtree looked up to find himself facing the

loaded pistol, to find his companion helpless, and with the coldest, cruelest eyes he had ever seen in all his own cruel career gazing at him significantly. Without a word, his hands dropped to his sides, and Mehitable, suddenly released, staggered and sat down unromantically upon a pile of hay.

Not a word more was spoken as the Indian, gesturing, marched his prisoners to the edge of the ladder hole and watched them reluctantly descend to the saddle room below. But he turned courteously at the sound of Mehitable's voice, as she pulled herself stiffly to her feet and approached him.

"Ah, Gray Hawk, it was most wonderful!" she said, with shining eyes, breathlessly. "The brutes might a-murdered us before they descended, had ye not done that which ye did!"

"Go down?" The Indian pointed questioningly toward the ladder hole, apparently ignoring her admiration; but Mehitable saw a flash of pleasure in the redman's eyes before his lids dropped mysteriously over them, and she knew he had accepted her praise.

"Aye! Let us go down!" And jauntily she climbed down the ladder, following close upon the redman's heels, for his training did not permit him to let the white squaw go first.

But, at the ladder foot, Mehitable faltered. She knew that help of some sort had arrived; but she

had not counted upon such a number of blue-uniformed men as awaited her in the saddle room, though their grim gaze softened at sight of her slim, ragged figure.

"Captain Littell!" she stammered. "Ah—ever—ever the—the—'Jersey Blues' are at hand in time o' need!" She stopped and her eyes swept gratefully the band of men, patriot farmers and neighbors, who had formed themselves into a company under the leadership of Captain Littell, to protect their homes and to avenge Tory outrages during the war. "Ah, gentlemen!" Her hands fluttered out to them, while the tears sprang to her eyes. "How can I thank ye?" She turned tremulously to Gray Hawk. "And ye?"

As though the sight of those tears, then, had swept aside a barrier, a tall figure in buff and blue, who had been hovering unnoticed behind the "Jersey Blues," came forward.

"Art—art—hurt?" stammered Anthony Freeman.

After an uncontrollable start, Mehitable paused, bowed hesitatingly. Then she glanced down humorously at her torn gown. "Only this," she said unsteadily. "Oh—and this!" In spite of herself, she uttered a stifled groan when she tried to lift her wrenched arm and her glance went to Hawtree, standing in the midst of a guard of four men.

Captain Freeman's gaze followed hers and, reading its meaning, he flushed angrily and turned impulsively to Captain Littell.

"Sir, have I your permission to deal wi' one o' the prisoners as I see fit?" he asked.

"Aye, sir!" responded Captain Littell.

"S-s-sir!" sputtered Simpson wildly.

No one paid the slightest attention. Every pair of eyes was fixed upon Hawtree's face who, aware of what was coming, looked at the floor in pretended unconcern.

"Hawtree"—Anthony Freeman spoke so sharply that involuntarily the rogue looked at him—"I charge ye briefly wi' being a spy, a traitor to New Jersey, a man who mistreats women and children, and a being no longer fit to live. I, therefore, sentence ye to immediate death by *hanging!*"

There was a breathless silence. Then, slowly, Hawtree's face turned to a dirty yellow, and there was an audible gasp from Simpson. Before any of the Tories could speak, however, Mehitable swept forward with her head up.

"Captain Littell," she said in a ringing voice, "I demand trial at Morris Town for this man Hawtree and a sentence *not* given in anger!"

Captain Littell, painfully embarrassed, glanced at the younger officer. Before he could speak, however, the other man bowed.

"May it please ye, sir, to do as the lady re-

quests," said Anthony Freeman coldly. He turned away as the "Jersey Blues" surrounded the downcast Tories and marched them out of the barn, followed by Gray Hawk.

But, once outside, there was a great hue and cry. Mehitable flew to the open door, to stare and point.

"'Tis Simpson!" she gasped. "He is escaping! How did he e'er get away? Run, Simpson," she screamed. "Run!"

Captain Freeman came hastily to the door and looked over her shoulder. "Why do ye bid the rogue run?" he demanded harshly.

"For Tabbie's sake!" Mehitable wrung her hands. "There, he has leaped upon one o' the horses—see how he rides! Oh, don't shoot!" Her hands flung themselves outward in a gesture of pleading, though no one but Anthony could hear her. "He be so young!" she half sobbed. "Don't shoot! Ah!"

As flame spat out from several muskets at once, Mehitable screamed again; then, as Simpson, galloping madly, reeled in his saddle, swayed headlong to the ground, so did Mehitable sink weeping to the floor of the saddle room, and for a little while only the sound of her sobs broke the stillness. Then Amos's voice spoke briskly.

"What be weeping for, mistress? The lad be not dead!" As Mehitable glanced up through her tears, the old farm servant nodded at her reassur-

ingly. "Nay, he was more scared than wounded! And Captain Littell, who did recognize the lad, did say his aunt—a lady o' wealth i' New York—hath been searching frantically for him, and that she hath promised, an he be found, to ship him and his sister, too, over to England!"

Good old Amos, who had sped help to her for all her having caused Dulcie's death! But here Amos stopped prattling abruptly. It was almost as though he were being pushed away, pushed right out of the barn by someone's dark eyes! Silence dribbled by for a few moments. Then Mehitable glanced up sideways through her curls.

"Ye—ye—did not leave any word at all—when ye left Newark!" she stammered reproachfully.

Now this was not at all what she had planned to say upon meeting Anthony Freeman again! But the blaze of hope and happiness that leaped into his dark eyes showed that it was exactly the right thing to have said! Before he could speak, however, two shadows slanted across the threshold, and Charity and a tall, awkward figure in Continental uniform came flying into the barn.

"Hitty!" gasped Charity. "Wherever ha' ye been! Why, the wedding is o'er! We thought ye had gone on to the church when ye did not come at Mother's call! How could you"—she looked at her sister wide-eyed—"how could you miss John's wedding!"

"'Twas a rare fine sight!" chimed in Young Cy eagerly. He looked at Mehitable with a more observant gaze than the excited Charity could bestow. "Whate'er has happened?" he asked, amazed. "What happened your gown?"

But Mehitable did not answer until, "Miss John's wedding!" she said, in a low voice. She looked away from them. "All—all—my life have I wanted to see a—a—wedding!"

Charity, about to hurry to her side, happened to glance at Captain Freeman and suddenly turned to Young Cy.

"C-come, Young Cy!" she stammered. "We—we—had better return! Mother might need me!" And slipping her hand through the young soldier's arm, she led him away, back through the sun-flecked orchard toward the old farmhouse.

Again there was silence; then Mehitable, whose eyes had dropped to the floor, uttered a joyful cry. She made a pounce forward.

"Cousin Eliza's buckle!" she gasped, holding up something that glittered. "Why, it must have dropped from Simpson's pocket! Oh, I do be so glad!"

But here she felt her hands being taken gently—oh, very gently, because of the wrenched arm—into someone's warm grasp.

"Little love," said Anthony Freeman, "look at me!"

Mehitable *tried* to raise her eyes—strange, what weight upon her lids!

"Nay, Captain Freeman," she began precipitately.

"Ye called me Anthony that night i' Newark!" interrupted the young man impetuously. "Oh, my dear—won't ye tell me wherein I ha' offended?"

Mehitable spoke in a very small voice. "Ye—ye did not say farewell i' Newark! Ye left without a word!"

"Why, my dear," Anthony stared at her in real surprise, "I left a note! Did ye not receive it at Mistress Hedden's? I told ye then I had to return to Morris Town at once!"

"Did—did you, indeed?" faltered Mehitable. She made a forgiving gesture. "Ah, well, it must have been o'erlooked in that despairing household, for they heard that Master Hedden did freeze his feet that dreadful night the British marched him clear to New York without shoes and he was cast into the Sugar House prison without proper medical attention! He can only come home to die, now, an he does get freed!"

Anthony made a gesture of sympathy to match Mehitable's; but his own affairs were too hang-fire for him to pause long over others' troubles.

"And—what else am I to be forgiven for?" he asked eagerly.

"Those ladies," murmured Mehitable.

"What ladies?" asked Anthony, puzzled.

"All"—Mehitable's voice dropped to a whisper —"all the ladies ye ha' kissed!"

"But," said Anthony Freeman reproachfully, "that was before I met you, sweetheart!"

And now what could Mehitable do but surrender her hands to his. Yet, even as he drew her into his arms, poor Anthony made a mistake!

"Little Mistress Madcap!" he murmured.

At that, Mehitable backed away, snatched her hands out of his grasp.

"Nay, sir!" she stormed, as he gaped at her. "I am no child! Name me no ridiculous names!" And she turned and fled out of the door.

With a gesture of laughing despair, Anthony strode after the slender, flying figure. Perhaps because he could take two steps to her one, perhaps for no reason at all, he caught up with her in the loveliest spot in the orchard, a place of green leaves and soft grass and bird songs. Anthony halted her by stepping smartly into her path.

"An ye do not want to be called Mistress Madcap," he asked her anxiously, "what *do* ye want to be called? Hitty?"

Mehitable glanced down at the buckle in her hand, meditatively flipped it, grinned to herself as she caught it dexterously, looked up at him provokingly as eighteen years of satin-cheeked, curly-haired maidenhood can.

"N-nay, I never liked the name o' Hitty nor yet that o' Mehitable," she said softly.

"How," he stepped a little closer, "how like ye the name o' Mistress—Anthony Freeman?"

"I—I—like it!" admitted honest Mehitable.

A little later, Mistress Condit looked thoughtfully along the wedding table and sighed, though merriment reigned its length, from the bride's and bridegroom's ecstatic faces to Gray Hawk's kind eyes. How like Mehitable, thought her mother, to be up long before dawn to make ready for the wedding, to miss it, then to linger, carefree, in the orchard with John's friend, as Charity, after peeping, had informed her!

"What can be delaying the madcap!" wondered Mistress Condit. But the next instant she smiled, for the two missing young people strayed in the kitchen door.

It was not until they were standing before her that she saw they came hand in hand!

THE END